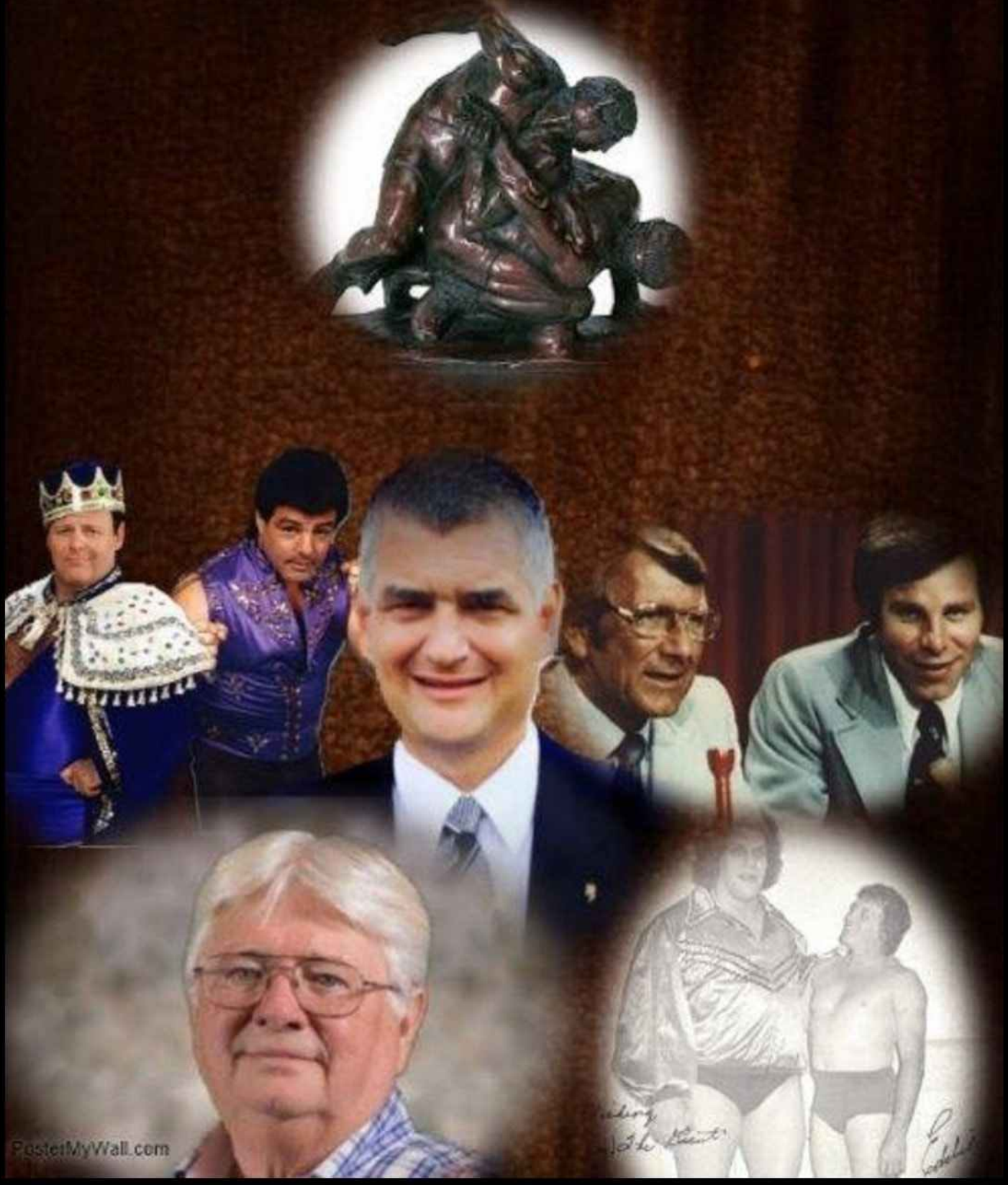
LIVING THE DREAM
MEMPHIS WRESTLING

THE RANDY HALES STORY



LIVING THE DREAM:
Memphis Wrestling

Randy Hales
The Founder, Owner & President of Power Pro Wrestling

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS/DEDICATION

Foreword:

When Randy Hales asked me to write the foreword for his book, I gladly agreed because Randy and I go back a long way. (Plus, I thought I might get a free book out of the deal!) I first met Randy when he was 10 years old in his hometown of Jonesboro, Arkansas. He was working for Eddie Marlin, selling programs and pictures of the wrestlers at the matches every Saturday night. From that humble beginning, Randy has worked in almost ever facet of Memphis wrestling. He's announced, refereed, managed, wrestled, booked, promoted, and finally, even owned a wrestling company! Randy's been dependable and reliable in whatever spot he was needed in.

Randy's got any number of backstage stories on the countless wrestlers that came through Memphis, and I'm sure some about the legendary announcer, Lance Russell. Perhaps even about the time we teamed him up with Lance at the announce table, but we thought Randy looked too young for that responsibility, so he grew a beard! (This made him look like a young Abe Lincoln!) Randy spent almost two years in Nashville working for Jerry Jarrett and me in 1994 and served as General Manager for the USWA. Later, I spent almost two years working for Randy when he owned the Power Pro Wrestling company. Randy has always been the one you could depend on and trust. I made him the General Manager of King Jerry Lawler's Hall of Fame Bar and Grille on Beale Street for this very reason. He's never lied to me and is faithful and loyal to me because of his lifelong love for Memphis wrestling. And the respect is mutual. Today, I'm a loyal listener to Randy's podcast about Memphis wrestling called "Memphis Memories" as well as "Talking Memphis Live" on Facebook. I really look forward to reading this book, as I'm sure you will, too. Oh, and another reason I promised to write this foreword for Randy's book is because he promised he wouldn't tell all the old stories he knows about me!! Enjoy!

CHAPTER 1:

April 14, 2001

It felt like a death in the family. I thought my life was over. That Saturday, over 19 years ago, I was upstairs in the control room of the WMC TV-5 studio, having just finished producing Power Pro show #154, the final episode of the show's run and the final live wrestling program ever aired from the legendary TV-5 studio.

To say I was obsessed with Memphis wrestling would be an understatement. From age 10 until that day, I never wanted to do anything else.

What led to this? I made bad decisions. Other people made bad decisions. I felt betrayed, and in my mind, I had thoughts that were not good. The truth is it wouldn't have taken much for me to go crazy.

I started Power Pro Wrestling with a three-year contract. By the start of year three, I knew I needed to start working on getting my agreement extended. This meant me reaching out to the management of TV-5. Each time I did, I was assured they were working on a new agreement. Despite their assurances, I was not 100% confident, but had no real reason to doubt their words. However, after the April 7, 2001 TV show, I was told the show would not be renewed and our last show would be April 14, the very next week. I was devastated. I felt that someone close to me had gotten close to the station's Vice President and everything I had dreamed about, worked for, and bled for, was about to be stolen from me.

Earlier in the week, I had considered not going to final show. I went as far calling Jerry Lawler, faxing him both the run sheet and format of the show and asked if he'd handle producing the show for me. I really did not know how I would react and, in my mindset at the time, I knew it could get bad, and get bad quickly. Thankfully, Brandon Baxter talked me into going. He thought I would regret it if I did not go to that last show, mainly to support the talent and to thank the fans, so I went.

Everything went well. I did an emotional live interview on TV explaining this was the last show. The Randy Hales everyone saw that

morning was friendly and all business to the talent; however, in my mind, I was not happy.

Then, just like that, the show was over. I packed up my briefcase and headed downstairs to say my goodbyes. There was only one last thing to do: I had decided to bring my truck, and I wanted a memory of my Power Pro days. After Brandon, who was riding with me, and I put our bags in the truck, I asked him to help me grab the Power Pro announce desk and help me put it in the back of my truck. We raised the overhead door. We took the desk out and put it in the truck, but we never closed the door. As I secured the desk in my truck, I caught a glimpse of three people, who I will name later, meeting with the management of TV-5, and saw them discussing what kind of changes they were going to make in the studio and to the set.

That is all it took for me to snap. The door was still open, and I picked up a big, metal pole. Remember, at that very moment I felt my life was over and one of those guys was going to pay big time. Brandon tried to grab the metal pole from me. I walked around him, pole in hand, with terrible ideas in my head. The way I was thinking, in about five minutes I would no longer be a free man. If I had done what I wanted to, I would have spent the rest of my life in prison. Right at that second, a Memphis police car drove up.

How did we get here? To know how this story ends, we must start from not only the beginning of Power Pro, but from the beginning of it all.

CHAPTER 2:

Growing up on Memphis Wrestling

A huge part of my story is the story of Memphis wrestling. Before getting to my story, I feel it is important to give you a little background about Memphis wrestling. I need to go back in time about a dozen years before I ever watched Memphis wrestling, before I was even born.

Most true wrestling fans know a little about Memphis wrestling. You know the success and you know the importance to the industry. You know how many current Hall of Fame wrestlers spent a lot of time in Memphis wrestling. This is the story of not only the death of Memphis wrestling but also, the birth, the life and the legacy of Memphis wrestling. I don't think there would be a WWE without Memphis wrestling. Even though I consider the glory days of Memphis wrestling to be from 1972 until 1989, there were magical moments before and after that period. In the 1950's, Sputnik Monroe and Billy Wicks were not only two of the pioneers of Memphis wrestling, but Sputnik helped change the culture of the city. Their August 17, 1959 match at Russwood Park in Memphis, with former World Champion boxer Rocky Marciano as champion, drew around 20,000 fans. To this day, this is the all-time attendance record for Memphis wrestling.

I think it is amazing when you look at all the home grown and mainstay talent that has become a part of the legacy of Memphis wrestling. I think everybody would say that the most important wrestler in the history of Memphis would be Memphis native Jerry Lawler. Jerry started his career in the early 1970's. His career has been very well documented. Someone recently asked me what the most impressive period of Lawler's career was. That is hard to answer. I would say this: In July of 1974, as the headliner of all five Mid-South Coliseum shows, wrestling drew over 60,000 fans. Memphis was a city of around 600,000 people. Top that.

Jerry Lawler became the King of Memphis wrestling. But here is a list of so many more mainstays who became legends: Jackie Fargo, Tojo Yamamoto, Jerry Jarrett, Bill Dundee, Handsome Jimmy Valiant, Austin Idol, Jimmy Hart, Jeff Jarrett, The Fabulous Ones, Joe Leduc, Jim Cornette, Bobby Eaton, Dennis Condrey, Rick Gibson, Robert Gibson, Rick Morton, referee Jerry Calhoun, announcers Lance Russell and Dave Brown, wrestler

and promoter Eddie Marlin, Kamala, Tommy Rich, Koko Ware, Tommy Gilbert, Eddie Gilbert, Doug Gilbert, Dutch Mantel and Brian Christopher all became big time stars in Memphis. These men transcended wrestling. They became a part of the culture of the entire city.

Think of all the wrestlers who started their career in Memphis who later ended up as WWE Hall of Fame members (or probably future members) such as Hulk Hogan, “Macho Man” Randy Savage, Sting, Ultimate Warrior, Steve Austin, Mick Foley, Kurt Angle, Daniel Bryan, Shawn Michaels, The Undertaker, Rocky Johnson, Miss Texas Jackie Moore and many more passed through the Memphis territory.

If you are reading this book, I am sure you have at least watched some Memphis wrestling. You know how big it was. If you grew up watching Memphis wrestling, it's hard to find another wrestling product that compares to those magic moments, even today. Even though a lot of my memories go back to the early 70’s when I first started with wrestling, most people consider the Memphis Wrestling glory days started in 1977 when Jerry Jarrett broke away from Nick Gulas and Roy Welch and started Jarrett Promotions. What drove the ship was the weekly live wrestling program that aired every Saturday Morning at 11am and ran for twenty years straight. This was always a lead-in to the Mid-South Coliseum shows every Monday Night. There was no internet back then, and what most of us did not know was that the Memphis show was taped and aired on television stations all over the territory. Live events were not only held in Memphis on Monday nights, but also on Tuesday in Louisville, Wednesday in Evansville, plus various other cities/towns throughout Arkansas, Mississippi, Kentucky, Indiana and Tennessee. Monthly big shows were held in Jackson, TN and Lexington, KY at the Rupp Arena. These shows were spearheaded by the television shows that did great ratings, the biggest of which was the live Saturday Memphis TV-5 show. The Memphis show at times saw ratings that resulted in 70 percent of people that were watching TV in the area being tuned in to the wrestling program. Tens of thousands of people paid money to go to the live events every week, with Memphis becoming the wrestling capitol of the world. Memphis fans especially were able to see the greatest talent in the world, with appearances from NWA World Champions and AWA World Champions, plus appearances from attractions like Andre the Giant, Dusty Rhodes and more.

Television drives the wrestling product and since the beginning of television, it always has. It still does today. The role of TV is different now. Back in the day, the number one purpose of television was to get people interested in the wrestlers and the action and for them to then spend money to see those wrestlers in important matches at the arena live events. Today, we still have live events. But unlike years ago, when the money revenue for promoters and wrestlers came almost 100% exclusively from live wrestling event ticket sales, today the number one revenue stream for the most successful wrestling company in the world is television rights. TV has always been important. Back then, without TV, you did not have a chance.

Studio wrestling is what Memphis wrestling is known for and it started in 1959 from the new studio of WMC-TV 5, with future television sports legend Big Jack Eaton as the host. The two men most people give the credit to for putting TV wrestling on the mat in Memphis were Billy Wicks and Sputnik Monroe. Promoter Buddy Fuller came to Memphis and landed the studio show and promoted live events at the Ellis Auditorium in Memphis. Even though the show was tremendously successful, the studio wrestling program was soon to make a big move and kick it off by naming Lance Russell as host of the new show.

Later in 1959, wrestling moved to the ABC affiliate WHBQ-TV 13. The wrestling fans in Memphis were introduced to talented stars like Jackie Fargo, Don and Al Greene, Tojo Yamamoto and Len Rossi. The show was going great, but another piece of the puzzle was added in 1966 when Dave Brown came aboard as Lance’s broadcast partner.

I believe that the arrival of two different young men is what put the Memphis wrestling territory over the top. In the late 60’s, Jerry Jarrett became the booker and match maker, as well as being one of the most popular wrestlers. Soon, Jarrett aligned himself with Tojo Yamamoto and Jackie Fargo. The other person responsible for putting Memphis wrestling over the top is the man who, still today, reigns supreme as the King of Memphis wrestling, Jerry Lawler. It was not very long before the studio wrestling program, which had been moved to live Saturday mornings at 11am, was one of the highest rated television programs of any show, at any time in the city. With a strong TV show, a great booker in Jerry Jarrett, a history making great announce team of Lance and Dave, a record-breaking heel drawing card in Lawler, and the move to the 11,000 seat Mid-South

Coliseum, Memphis became the best wrestling city in the world, but more changes were to come.

The best talents in the world would constantly be brought into Memphis. A key addition in 1975 was Superstar Bill Dundee. Bill, who initially came in with his partner George Barnes, stayed when George went back to Australia and became one of the biggest drawing babyfaces in history. Of course, no doubt about it, Bill was involved in the longest running, biggest drawing feud in the history of not only the entire Memphis territory, but possibly the entire country as he battled Jerry Lawler in many, many wild and classic matches with a variety of stipulations.

The Memphis wrestling landscape would soon be changed forever. Nick Gulas and Roy Welch were the promoters, but Jerry Jarrett was the man behind the success of Memphis. While Nick and Roy concentrated on Chattanooga, Birmingham and Nashville, Jarrett concentrated on Memphis, the smaller cities around Memphis plus Louisville and Lexington, KY and Evansville, IN. The Jarrett end was the money-making end of the territory. In 1977, Jarrett and Nick had a major failing out and Jarrett resigned from the Gulas-Welch wrestling Company and started his own Promotion. In 1977, WHBQ did not want to get involved in a wrestling war so they canceled wrestling all together, despite the incredible ratings and success of the show. Jarrett and Lawler were able to go to WMC TV-5, a station with larger coverage, and take most of the stars with them. Eventually Lance and then Dave came along, too. Thus, begins the Legend of the Memphis territory. The history of Memphis wrestling must be credited to many people, but, I will state time after time, the credit for the legacy of Memphis wrestling mainly goes to the founder and the genius of Jerry Jarrett, who is, in my opinion, the greatest wrestling businessman and booker of all time.

Now that you have a little background on Memphis wrestling, let’s get back to my story. I was born in December 1961 in Jonesboro, AR, only 75 miles from Memphis. The good news for me was both Channel 13 and Channel 5 came on in Jonesboro so one Saturday morning in 1971, when I was nine or ten, I just happened to watch Studio Wrestling from Memphis. I was hooked by watching Jackie Fargo, Jerry Jarrett, Tojo Yamamoto, Tommy Gilbert, Eddie Marlin, Don and Al Greene, Len Rossi and Dr. Ken Ramey’s Interns. The Memphis office would run live events in Jonesboro every Saturday night. I had great parents, but they were not wrestling fans. I would talk them into taking me to the Jonesboro matches every few months.

As a kid, my getting involved in the wresting business happened in a strange way. One day my dad walked me to the City and Light Park. At the park also was Charlie Wade, who had walked his son Randy Wade across the street to play. Randy and I started talking and since we both loved wrestling, the talk soon turned to wrestling. Randy was a few years younger than me, but we became great friends. Randy told me that his dad was a member of the American Legion and he was the local promoter for the weekly wrestling matches. He told me he could have a guest and I could come with him for free, every Saturday, which a dream was come true for me. Through that connection, I met the person in charge of the Memphis wrestling office, Eddie Marlin. After that meeting, I started selling Eddie's wrestling photos at the Saturday night wrestling events. It later snowballed and I also sold photos of Fargo, Jarrett, Tojo, Lawler and Dundee. I got lucky as they liked me, they liked that I hustled, and that I sold lot of pictures. This made them extra money, so even though I was only a kid, I got over with the powers that be. Another strange break happened when I was thirteen. By this time, I never dreamed of being a wrestler, a booker or a promoter, but I did dream of being the next Lance or Dave. I was always carrying around a microphone pretending to be a DJ or a wrestling announcer. For the Jonesboro matches, they had a ring announcer named Charles Jewel. Charles was a member of the American Legion. Long story short, one week he stole a bunch of money from an American Legion Fund Raiser and that Saturday night he flew the coop. Eddie Marlin was in a bind, as this left them with no announcer. Eddie knew I wanted to be an announcer, so he asked me to do it. At the start, I never got paid, but truth be told, I would have paid them to do it. Believe me, the money would come later. Even though I was a kid, but getting older, I got new stuff to do which they paid me for. Eddie asked me to write articles for the weekly program that was sold all over the territory. Later, he asked me to go to Blytheville and other local spot shows to announce. After I graduated from High School in 1980, I started going to the matches in Memphis every Monday night and Lance would even let me announce half of them. My dad died in early 1981 and Eddie Marlin became a father figure for me. After college, I started announcing all over the territory. I would ride to the shows with Eddie, staying at either his or Jerry Jarrett's house. My dream kept progressing and it led to Jerry Lawler offering me a full-time gig in the business after I got out of college. I thought it would never end.

I graduated high school from Jonesboro High School in 1980. I had to decide what to do next in my life. At this point, I knew my life ambition was to be in the wrestling business, but I had no aspirations about promoting or booking. I wanted to be the next Lance Russell. After high school, I decided to attend college at Arkansas State University in my hometown of Jonesboro, majoring in radio and television. This was a major deal. Neither of my parents went to school past the 8th grade and my sister did not further her education after high school. I started college in the fall of 1980. I lived through the first major tragedy of my personal life in February of 1981. I had started traveling to Memphis every Monday night for wrestling in January, and even though my dad was very sick, my mother encouraged me to go to Memphis on Monday, February 3, 1981 because she knew I was excited that the main event was going to be Jerry Lawler vs Hulk Hogan. Even today, I regret that choice personally as when I got home that night, my dad had passed away. Not having a father in my life, Eddie Marlin immediately took that role, a role that he continued for the rest of his life.

I don't remember much about my college career as it is a blur, but I do remember two stories that are very much related to my upcoming wrestling career. I remember being frustrated with college. My dream was wrestling. I went to Eddie Marlin and told him I was going to quit college and I ask for a job. I thought Eddie was being tough and mean at the time. Today, I know he was using tough love. Eddie told me I could quit college and he would give me $50 a week to mow his yard and take his garbage out or, I could finish my college and have a chance to have a long career and make a lot of money. I chose to finish college and I am so grateful that I took Eddie's advice.

I had a television production class my junior year. Our main project in that class was that every student had to produce our own thirty-minute television show that would air on the college cable television station. I decided to do my show on Memphis wrestling. I talked to Jerry Jarrett and he let me borrow several videos from his library and I titled my show "A Look at Pro Wrestling." I produced and hosted the show. For my special guest, Lance Russell made the drive over (at no cost) to help me with the project and the show. I got the highest grade in the class, an A, and it was the first television show I ever produced. Thanks so much to Lance for coming to Jonesboro and helping me get an A.

My goal was still to become the next Lance Russell or Dave Brown. One night, I was booked in Blytheville to announce and Lawler was doing the booking. I overheard Lawler saying that Dave Brown was off on vacation and would not be at TV the next day. I thought I was ready, and I asked Lawler if I could do the show with Lance. At the time, I was already helping Lance with the play by play on Monday nights at the Mid-South Coliseum and I felt I was ready for live television. Lawler said it was OK with him but to check with Lance. I called Lance and he explained that live TV was a different animal and he did not think I was ready. I cried all night. I did not go to TV the next day, but Lance came up to me right away that next Monday. I resented Lance for a couple of days but after talking to Lance, I realized my time would come and I was not ready. My day would come, but not without a change of direction.

I graduated Arkansas State University in 1984. I still did not get an official full-time position, but I certainly was on the right track. I just did not realize it. The ring announcer in Louisville, Kentucky had left, and they needed a new person in the role. So, I got the gig. I started living my car in Memphis on Monday nights and would ride back to Nashville with Eddie Marlin, Randy West and Jerry Jarrett. Jerry had reformed his tag team with Tojo Yamamoto and had made an in-ring comeback. I would go with Jerry and Tojo every Tuesday and stay the night with Jerry on Tuesday and Wednesday nights. This is where my wrestling education really started as Jerry would invite me to the office as he did the booking. In 1985, Tom Renesto was hired as booker. Tom had wrestled as one of the original Masked Assassins and had a tremendous track record as a booker. However, after only a few weeks, Jerry felt Tom was not working out. Jerry kept Tom around and would have Tom come to the office every day. Even though Tom still had the official title of booker, it was Jerry who actually did the booking. I found that Jerry would talk to me during these meetings more than he talked to Tom. What I did not realize was Jerry was getting me ready to be the booker. By getting to spend so many days with Jerry in the wrestling office where he created his magic, I was being mentored on the wrestling business, from both a creative and wrestling perspective, without even knowing it.

A booker’s work is not just done in the office. As a matter of fact, most of the booking was done either in the car on road trips or at the live events. I remember making one trip with Jerry and Tojo to Louisville. Tojo always

drove, Jerry sat in the front and I was in the back. It was almost always just the three of us on the trip to Louisville. I will never forget one trip. Almost every Tuesday, Jerry would get his briefcase out and start writing the television show. However, this week, it was different. He looked back at me and said he was about to take a nap. He handed me the television format from the last week as well as the card he had already booked for the upcoming Monday. He asked me to lay out the TV and we would go over my work when he woke up. I was familiar with how to format television. I had watched Jerry do it a hundred times and I always made sure I got a copy of the format. I would practice writing shows every week, but I never shared with Jerry or anybody else I was doing it. What Jerry did not know was I had already written a sample show the night before when I got back to Eddie's house from Memphis. I had a work in progress already completed. I took what I had, changed a few things and rewrote the television show. When Jerry woke up, if he was ever asleep in the first place, he asked if I was finished. I used carbon paper, so I gave him a copy of the show and I went over the entire show, from the open till the close. Jerry never said a word but Tojo kept nodding his head and had a big smile on his face. Jerry then asked if I would mind some feedback. I was nervous, but I certainly wanted to hear what he said. He went back over every segment, told me what he liked but he also explained what he thought would work better. It was a laid back, fun, and educational conversation. Jerry then asked if I minded if he rewrote the show. He did and then went over his format. I was shocked, but his format included about 75 to 80% of what I had written. I got my first lesson in writing TV that Tuesday night in 1985. I would get my chance, along with Jeff Jarrett, to write a real television show about three years later.

CHAPTER 3:

The Rise and Fall of Randy Hales…and Memphis Wrestling

I would continue to grow up in wrestling. I was on the road every week and I would continue to go to Louisville every Tuesday, staying at Eddie's house Mondays and at Jerry's house on Tuesdays and some Wednesdays. I had spent four years in college and had graduated, but this is where my real education started, both in wrestling and real life. At this point I did not go to TV, but I started to help Eddie promote smaller shows, (called spot shows), around the territory. I also went to the weekly Jonesboro cards and the Memphis and Louisville shows each week.

Life on the road in the wrestling business can be crazy and sometimes dangerous. My mother was worried all the time and was always relieved when I arrived home safely. At that point, she did not have to worry about me hanging with the wrong people or doing anything to get into trouble. I traveled with Eddie or Jerry most of the trips and they certainly were not going to let me do anything stupid. There were a few trips where Eddie or Jerry was not at the town, but they always made sure I rode with Tojo Yamamoto. Tojo was a legend in Memphis wrestling, making his debut in the 60's as a hated villain. Tojo is best remembered as the guy who saved young wrestler Jerry Jarrett from a beating and they soon became the most popular team in the history in Memphis wrestling, up to that point. I would argue that they are the most successful drawing baby face team in history. In the 80's, the Fabulous Ones were hot and drew huge crowds, but the television world had changed, and they never drew the crowds Tojo and Jerry did ten years prior. Tojo was loyal to Jerry and would protect Jerry with his life. Tojo would also protect those who were close to Jerry and I think Tojo took it on himself to help mentor me. Tojo was a character and I have so many fun stories about him. I will share a few Tojo stories here. Remember, I grew up in Jonesboro, Arkansas, which was a small city at the time. I was from a normal church going, hardworking family and in those days, I was very naïve to the world. I was now in the real world and I would

meet and associate with all kinds of people and Tojo Yamamoto was truly one of a kind. I would not be honest if I didn't tell you that Tojo could be mean and even vicious. But he could also be sweet, caring and funny. One Tuesday, Tojo, Jerry and I headed to Louisville. For some reason, we took Jerry's limousine. It was unusual to take that car when there was just the three of us. Jerry did not like to sit in the back, so he asked me to sit back there by myself and he sat up front with Tojo. We left Hendersonville and as we took the ramp to I-65 North to head to Louisville, Jerry asked Tojo to pull over on the ramp. Jerry needed to empty his cup. So, as instructed, Tojo pulled over. I was sitting in the seat behind Tojo as we pulled over. What we did not know was at the exact spot Tojo pulled over, there stood a hitchhiker. I don't know how we did not see the guy, but we did not. When we pulled over, the hitchhiker thought we were picking him up. So, at the same time Jerry opened the front door, this hitchhiker opened my door and sat down beside me. This scared me to death! This dude was big, unshaven, and smelled bad. I was shocked and did not know what to do. Jerry was also shocked but I think Jerry knew that Tojo would have it all under control. Tojo started cutting a promo on the guy, cussing him like a dog. I will never forget Tojo's words as he yelled, "Hey you SOB, you MF'er, get out of here, you no good son of a gun! You no good son of a gun, get out or I will kill you!" I can't remember for sure, but Jerry and I both think that Tojo probably pulled his gun on the dude. Jerry can see himself screaming at Tojo, "Don't Shoot!" After the fact, this story is funny, and I have told the story thousands of times. I remember the hitchhiker being scared to death as he got out of the limo and ran down the road to get as far away from Tojo as possible. I could fill up this book with funny Tojo stories. However, the Tojo story does not have a happy ending. Tojo was a strong, tough and proud man. Tojo retired in 1991 due to health issues, which included diabetes. Tojo did not feel he could live like this and he thought he would become a burden to others. Tojo died at his home in Nashville on February 19, 1992 at age 65 of a self-inflicted gunshot wound. Tojo will forever be remembered by not only me, but by all his many friends and fans.

By, November, Jerry made the call to bring Bill Dundee back in as booker. I believe I am correct in saying that Bill was Jerry's most prized booking student at that point. Bill was also one of the top stars in the history of the territory. With, Bill, Jerry would get an experienced booker, with success booking in Memphis, and a main event wrestler. Jerry had sent Bill

to Bill Watt's Mid-South Wrestling in 1984 and Bill had the best booking run in the history of that territory. I traveled with Bill many times when he first returned to Memphis and I continued my booking education. I had learned Jerry Jarrett's style as a booker and I then had the chance on these trips to learn Bill's booking style.

Bill's reign as booker this in this period is best remembered for him defeating Jerry Lawler in a Loser Leaves Town match. Bill's reign is also known for Lawler's return, and the story of where Bill and Buddy Landel beat up young referee Jeff Jarrett on TV, which resulted in the last ever sell out at the Mid-South Coliseum when Dundee and Landel faced Lawler and Dutch Mantel. This angle, created in part by Dundee, Jerry Jarrett and Jerry Lawler, is one of my favorite stories ever told on Memphis TV. Bill's first run in Memphis lasted about 8 years but this run did not last as long. Bill's daughter, who is married to Beautiful Bobby Eaton, was living in Charlotte, NC. Bill got an offer to go to Mid Atlantic Wrestling as a wrestler and as assistant booker to Dusty Rhodes. That led to Memphis needing a new booker and me having to grow up even more in the wrestling business.

Even though Bill had been the booker, Jerry Jarrett was also heavily involved. Jarrett decided it was time for Jerry Lawler to take over the book again. The office was based at Jarrett's house in Hendersonville, TN, but Lawler lived in Memphis, 230 miles away. This resulted in me getting my biggest break in the business so far. Lawler had known me since I was a kid and knew my background. It was very time consuming for Lawler to not only wrestle every night, but to also handle the business and booking duties as well. He needed an assistant and asked me if I was interested. I jumped all over the opportunity. I moved away from home for the first time in my life and became a full-time wrestling business guy. I was officially made the Assistant Booker, and for television purposes, I was announced as General Manager of Jarrett Promotions.

I will never forget what Jerry Lawler did for me. I was in the door already, but this opportunity established me as a major figure in the Memphis wrestling territory. I had already observed the booking styles of both Jerry Jarrett and Bill Dundee. This gave me the chance to observe Lawler's booking style and learn from it as well. I think it is important to note that there was a huge reason Jerry Jarrett decided to take a leave of absence and go away for a year. After the angle where his son Jeff was beat up, Jeff was now going to become a full-time wrestler. Jerry did not want it

to appear to be another George Gulas situation, so in Jeff's first year, it was Jerry Lawler, not Jerry Jarrett that was doing the booking. I started going to TV every week and went to most of the towns as well. I became very close to Jeff Jarrett and we traveled together to many shows. Lawler had a much different booking style than Jerry Jarrett. Lawler was very creative and a very good booker, but he was not very detailed. While Jarrett planned everything in advance, Lawler booked at the last minute. It was not unusual for Lawler to start writing TV at midnight on Friday Night or sometimes early Saturday morning. I don't mean this as a knock as this style worked for him. This gave me the chance to start coming up with finishes for all the matches that didn't involve Lawler. This also gave me experience in helping produce the TV. This was also my first experience in talent relations. Even though I was being paid very good money, this was also the continuation of my education in the wrestling business and it was invaluable. This run of Lawler as booker was very successful. The year 1986 was the year where the Lawler vs Idol and Rich program became very successful. At the same time, Jeff got over with the fans. He was put in a young tag team with Pat Tanaka and then with Billy Travis and they drew record business on many spot shows, cards Lawler was not on. I learned a valuable lesson: if you had a young talent that was athletic, good looking with a family wrestling background, this person could be a star. This was a fun period in my life, and I learned a lot.

After a year, it was time for a booking change. It is very easy to burn out when you are booking but also have the responsibility of being the main event star. That is why Lawler and Jarrett took turns booking. At times, they took six month runs and at other times they went a year or longer. In 1987, the territory had dropped some, and it was once again Jarrett's turn. I was nervous about this change. I knew Jarrett liked me, but I also knew I was living in Memphis and Jarrett did his booking out of his house in Hendersonville. I also knew he wanted to teach Jeff the business and booking side of wrestling. I was afraid my run was coming to an end, but Jarrett wanted me to move to Hendersonville to help him in the office and to further my education. Jerry took me under his wing and amped up the education. He helped me find an apartment near the office and on two different occasions, helped me pick out a new car. Jeff and I would spend many hours under the learning tree of Jerry Jarrett. I spent more time in the office than Jeff did because Jeff would always get in a workout before

coming to the office. At that time, one year into Jeff's career, we did not push his role in the office. I was the guy, especially when Jarrett was not in town, who was the go-to guy in the office. I made rookie mistakes, especially with how I dealt with the talent, but I was learning every day. Jerry also trusted me and Jeff to write the television on our own when he would be in Florida on vacation. From the beginning, Jeff and I had different strengths. I was good at the big picture and writing the TV. Jeff was great at coming up with finishes. We made a hell of a team.

Within the next couple of years, we did some great stuff. I am not trying to take credit for any of these ideas, but I did have input and was a part of the discussions. Most of these ideas originated from either Jerry Jarrett or Jerry Lawler. I will even credit Austin Idol for being involved in the creative of one of these events. First, there was the classic Hair VS Hair cage match between Idol and Lawler where Tommy Rich hid under the ring and ended up costing Lawler his hair. This is an unbelievable moment and is one of the best angles in the history of Memphis wrestling. We also had an idea to do a Scaffold Match between Idol and Rich against Lawler and Dundee that did great business. I do think that was my idea because I remember having to sell the idea to Lawler, Dundee, Rich and Idol. Dundee loved those types of matches, but it wasn't easy getting Idol and Rich agree to do it. This period also saw Lawler finally winning the AWA World Title from Curt Hennig in Memphis in May of 1988. I get chills every time I think about this period.

Jerry Lawler's quest for the World Title was a Jarrett idea started in 1974. Once Lawler finally reached is goal and became champion, the fans had finally got what they wanted to see for over a decade. Business then went down tremendously. Not only was business bad, but things started going bad for me personally as well. I made the mistake of trying to be one of the boys. This never worked. I was drinking way too much, not sleeping enough and I even tried pot for the first time. I had never been a big drinker, and I certainly had never tried pot. I remember the story of the first time I smoked pot. I was riding back to Nashville on a Monday night after the matches. We stopped and I bought a bottle of Jack Daniels and I killed it quickly. I was in the back seat with Jeff. Curt Hennig was driving, and Brian Knobbs of the Nasty Boys was in the front seat. I got drunk quick. Jeff then spoke up and said that Curt wanted to smoke dope but since I was office, he wanted to ask. It was their car and I made the decision to tell him

I did not care. I was drunk and was not in my right mind. Today, I would not smoke pot alone, much less with the boys. With Curt, former World Champion and future WWE star, I smoked pot for the first time. The next day I was so paranoid about going to the office. I was so afraid Jerry Jarrett would smell the pot on me and fire me. I was lucky, as Jerry was hunting ducks that day and never came in the office. I never liked smoking pot and did not do that very often. I deeply regret ever trying it and I regret what it led to later. At this point, I was drinking every day and would smoke pot from time to time. I thought I was being one of the boys. I tell this story now and I tell more drug related stories in this chapter not to glorify it. I want people, especially the young folks, to realize that you must be smart daily about what you drink, what you smoke and who you hang out with. Drinking and pot leads to things far worse.

It was around this period I learned just how strong Memphis wrestling was on television. Even though I was on television from time to time, I did not appear as much as I would later in my career. At the same time, I did not realize how many people knew who all of us were. I remember learning this the hard way. Jeff Jarrett and I were both at a spot show in Kentucky on a Friday night, 400 miles from Memphis and we had to be back in Memphis for TV the next morning. Jeff had asked Ronnie Gossett to drive us to Memphis. Jeff and I both started drinking as soon as we got in the car. By the time we got to interstate 40, exit 126, we decided to stop at the Sugar Tree truck stop to grab something to eat. We were both as drunk as we could be, but this was routine. We did not think much about it. Jerry Jarrett was in Florida on vacation. We made it through the weekend and the Monday Memphis show. Jeff and I met at the office on Tuesday to start working on writing the next television show. We were both about to learn a hard lesson. I wish I could say we changed our behavior right then, but we did not. I am glad to say that now, so many years later, both of us have learned the lesson. People are always watching, they always know who we are, and our actions can create a bad impression. That day, I was talking on the phone when Jeff came in, so he started going through the mail. I saw that Jeff was reading a letter and the expression on his face had quickly changed. I got off the phone and Jeff asked if I got any mail. He found an envelope for me in the same handwriting with the same return address as the one he had been reading. He also found an envelope addressed to Jerry Jarrett. After reading the conclusion of this story, you will have an idea of

how Jerry's letter conveniently got lost and he never got that piece of mail. The letter was from a lady and she explained that she and her kids were in the same truck stop we had been on Friday night. The mother and her kids were all wrestling fans and they knew both of us. They were so excited to see us and to meet us. That meeting never happened. The letter explained that it was obvious to her that Jeff and I were both drunk and we were being loud and obnoxious. She said that she was ashamed of our behavior and we both needed to realize that we had young fans and that we had made a bad impression with them. I think of this story a lot. Jeff and I were both young but both of us were raised better and knew better. I was ashamed and Jeff was ashamed. Neither one of us wanted his dad to find out, because knowing Jerry Jarrett, we both would have been not only lectured but probably fired as well. Jerry never knew. Even though we both learned this lesson, it took years. I apologize to anybody that I ever offended. As I got older, I have always told this story and try to teach a life lesson to young people.

I pride myself on having a very good memory. I have real good recall on even the smallest details of not only my career in wrestling, but my life. I regret not having good recall of a critical time period in 1989. I know I was drinking way too much, and I remember that I was also quite stressed. This was the time where Jerry Jarrett had gone to Texas to attempt to save the World Class Wrestling territory in Dallas that he had bought into. Jeff was also making trips to Texas. Jerry was still officially booking Memphis, but the booking was left to me and Jeff. Since Jeff was also going to Dallas, the responsibility of running Memphis was on me. Jerry Jarrett thought I was ready. Eddie Marlin thought I was ready. Jerry Lawler thought I was ready. Even I thought I was ready. However, even though most of the talent liked me as a person and respected me as an assistant, I did not have their confidence. At that time, I also lacked the maturity and the knowledge to be the guy. I consider this my first booking run. Maybe since I did not do a very good job and business was bad, I do not have a good memory of this. I do remember, after a long weekend of drinking a lot, I got sick and ended up in the hospital for a few days. I had strep throat and viral meningitis. While I was out for a week, Jerry got back involved and helped Jeff with the booking. I remember thinking I was killing myself, not making very much money, and that I felt miserable. I knew the wrestling business was my dream, but I was thinking it felt more like a nightmare. I know my next

decision was one of the worst career decisions of my life that created bad feelings with people that I had relationships with all my life. I hate that my memory on this is bad and I can't find any of my date books or television formats to have a timeline and specific dates. I believe this was around April of 1989. I don't know what the final straw was, but I do remember I went to Lawler after the show and told him I was quitting. I never drove to Memphis from Nashville by myself but for some reason I was by myself on this trip. Instead of going back to Nashville, I drove home to Jonesboro and I distanced myself from the wrestling business for the next four years. This was a low point in my life. I made a lot of mistakes. I had achieved a position that, ten years earlier, I never thought was possible. I thought I was going to be this remarkable success story, the guy who was able to live out his dreams. My brief run in running Memphis wrestling was a big, huge failure.

I was done with the wrestling business. I just snuck away like a thief in the night. I cut off every relationship I had ever had. Looking back, this might be the most awful thing I had ever done in my life. I don't have very many regrets, but I do regret this. I turned my back on people who cared about me, people who gave me my dream and people who I not only I loved but who loved me. I don't know if my lack of memories from this period is due to the amount of drinking I was doing at the time or if it is due to regrets and trying to forget this ever happened. I cut off all ties to the business and rarely, if ever, watched wrestling. I had some family property I owned in Jonesboro and I spent most of the next few years selling gravel and dirt. This doesn't sound exciting but money wise, but I made more money than I ever had in my life.

As my break from the wrestling life continued, Memphis wrestling carried on. Things were changing. Cable TV came along. The World Wrestling Federation became national, then worldwide. At that point, most of the territories went out of business. Business in the Memphis territory got bad, with record low attendance most of the time for four or five years. I watched from time to time but had no desire to get back in the business because I thought those bridges were burned. Instead, I did other things with my life.

Even though I was trying to convince myself I was done with wrestling, I was fooling myself. During my wrestling break, I had acquired a small fortune after building it over a few years. As time passed, I started getting

the wrestling itch again. I guess I needed to get back to wrestling in order to blow that fortune.

During this time, I remember getting involved with the American Legion again. They had a baseball team and I was friends with the coach and the people who ran the program. I missed the performance part of the wrestling business. I started doing the PA announcing of their games and started going to the road games. I totally quit drinking, smoking pot or doing anything against the values that my family had taught me. I also started helping with the grounds crew at the baseball park. I enjoyed the hard work and being outside. One of the men in charge was Carlton Grey and he was the person in charge of the wrestling matches at the American Legion. Carlton was always telling me that Eddie Marlin frequently asked about me and Carlton said I should come one night and see Eddie. I did not want to do this at first, because I was embarrassed and ashamed, and I did not want to face Eddie, Lawler or Jeff. Carlton insisted. He promised me that nobody was mad and that everybody would be glad to see me.

I decided to go early one Saturday, just to see Eddie. I went and it was like nothing had ever happened. It was a miracle that I was accepted in the business in the first place and it was an even bigger miracle that I was accepted back in the wrestling family. I got back involved in wrestling a little bit at a time. At first, I sold tickets in Jonesboro. I traveled with Eddie to spot shows. I also helped Jeff with a marketing project he was working on. Around 1993, Jerry Jarrett was hired as a consultant and moved to the East Coast to work in Stanford at WWE Headquarters. Jerry asked me to start coming to TV to help Jeff. Lawler had started working part time for WWE, but just for a couple of days each week. It wasn’t long before Jeff was offered a full-time spot on the road with the WWE. With Jeff gone, Lawler took over the booking and wanted me to return as his assistant. Lawler would do TV every week and the Monday night shows at the Coliseum, but he did not make many of the other towns. So, I was back on the road again and back in the wrestling business. The more everybody else got involved with the WWE, the more I got involved in Memphis wrestling.

The territory had not been in good shape in several years. The wrestling landscape had changed and most of the original territories were going out of business. There was fear that with Lawler now becoming more part time than ever, Jerry Jarrett living on the East Coast, and Jeff Jarrett hitting the road full-time for the WWE, that it could be the beginning of the end for the

Memphis territory. With Jeff gone and with Lawler working part time, Brian Christopher was switched babyface and got over. Lawler started a feud between Brian and Doug Gilbert that clicked with the fans and lasted on and off for decades. The WWE would send big name talent to the weekly Memphis shows, but the rest of the territory was in bad shape. On weeks that WWE did not send talent to Memphis, it was not drawing either. Lawler was doing a good job, but he was not fully focused on the territory. He was distracted. I knew we needed to do something big to get us jump started. Our biggest issue was that most of our fans had lost interest in our product. Cable television had taken over. People could watch shows from the comfort of their own homes from arenas with thousands of fans in attendance featuring world-wide stars in marquee matches. I felt that for us to survive, we had to do something to get people back interested in Memphis wrestling. I felt we needed a big show with a big crowd. I thought the best way to do this was to present a Legends Night. I put the idea down on paper and presented the idea to Lawler. He thought it was a good idea and he gave me the green light to do the show. We named the show "Monday Night Memories." I knew we needed to promote this event for several weeks. I started airing Monday Night Memories segments every week for over a month. Instead of just promoting the event in Memphis, I promoted the show throughout the territory. In an era of super shows, I wanted this to be a super show, too. I loaded the show with every legend I could book. I brought back Jimmy Valiant, Austin Idol, Terry Funk and more. I showed every clip I could find of every classic Memphis wrestling event. I tried to get Jimmy Hart to appear at the show, but he was nervous that appearing at this show would get heat with his current employer, WCW. Instead, Hart wrote a song called Monday Night Memories that we could use in a video. He also agreed to call in and do a live telephone interview on the March 5th go home show. Everything was lined up, but we needed one more hook. Memphis was drawing 800-1000 people every week, sometimes worse. With top WWE talent like Bret Hart, we would do 1200-1500 people. My goal for this show was to do 3 or 4 thousand people. We needed to celebrate the history of Memphis wrestling. I decided to do a Memphis wrestling Hall of Fame and a Parade of Stars which would include every Memphis legend I could find. We had never done a show like this in the history of Memphis wrestling. I still felt something was missing from the show. Our advance ticket sales were moving better than normal,

but we needed for the go home TV show for the event to push us over the top. We needed Lance Russell. Lance Russell had not been on Memphis wrestling in five years. He had left to join WCW. His contract with WCW had expired and Lance was back in Memphis, happily retired. Lance and I had continued to talk from time to time. I reached out and set up a meeting to get him to come back for one TV and the Mid-South Coliseum show. It was a tough sell. There were some bad feelings. Lance's wife Audrey did not want him to do it. I offered Lance a good money deal for two days. I begged, I had Lawler beg and we convinced Lance to come back one time only. The pressure was on. There were those in our office, including Eddie's other son-in-law Randy West that thought I was thinking too big and that the show would be a huge money losing event. Lawler was confident this would work. I had the show budgeted where we had to draw 1800 paying fans. I did not think this was a risk. Lawler went to bat for the idea and the show would occur. I hadn't written a wrestling television show in years and I knew this would be the most important show I had ever written. The TV was a home run. Eddie Marlin called Jerry Jarrett and said this was the best money show he had ever seen. I knew we hit a home run but was hoping that it would turn into ticket sales. I found out on March 7th of 1994 as we drew over 9,000 fans and had the best Memphis house since 1989. I would say that this Monday Night Memories event will go down as one of my top three memories in the wrestling business. We had many of our fans back, so we needed to take advantage of our one-night super success.

At this point, this was the highlight of my time in wrestling, not only as a promoter but also as a fan. I had the chance to do both. The concept of the Monday Night Memories event was for me to pay tribute to my heroes. This was double enjoyment for me as I not only enjoyed the show as a fan, but I got to create and produce the event. I certainly cannot take all the credit for the night. The idea would not have seen the light of day without Jerry Lawler giving the greenlight and letting me take the idea and go with it. Randy West, our video editor, did a great job helping produce the memories segments we used to promote the event. Jimmy Hart could not be at the event, but he wrote the song, Monday Night Memories that Randy put in a video and that video put the event over the top. Eddie Marlin was encouraging and worked hard to help me contact talent and set up the event. Buddy Wayne helped in that area as well. Dave Brown and Corey Maclin contributed as well. However, the key to the success of the event was the

return of Lance Russell and I will always be thankful to Lance. Jerry Jarrett was living on the East Coast and would just return home for his son Jason's high school football games, but Jerry did come to this event. I remember even asking Jerry for input on a finish of a couple of matches. I am so glad Jerry was able to see the event. I know I am leaving out people, and this isn't my intention. I'd like to give big thanks to all of the legends who appeared at the event, the guest stars we brought in to wrestle on the card and to the roster at the time, who were working hard to bring our product back to the level it once was. It is ironic that it took the legends of the past to kick start a time period where Memphis wrestling was relevant once again.

Before I close out this section about the Monday Night Memories event on March 7, 1994, I want to share a few of my favorite memories of the night. I remember that we got all the legends together in a room, so I could go over what they would be doing. I was in a room with dozens of Memphis wrestling legends. Jerry Lawler, as an owner and the booker, welcomed the legends and thanked them for being a part of the event. I was shaking in my shoes and had chills when Lawler reintroduced me to the group of legends. I was no longer the kid fan who sold pictures. I was no longer the 13-year-old ring announcer. Jerry introduced me as his assistant booker and the person who came up with Monday Night Memories and the person who was producing the event. Talk about living a dream. I was about to address the room that was packed with legends that I grew up admiring. As I prepared to speak, I knew I had the attention of Jerry Lawler, Jerry Jarrett, Eddie Marlin, Sputnik Monroe, Handsome Jimmy Valiant, Don Greene, Al Greene, Billy Wicks, Phil Hickerson, Lance Russell and so many more. I will never forget that moment.

I enjoyed the entire event, but I want to briefly discuss two other things. We did a Parade of Legends and the first ever Memphis Wrestling Hall of Fame ceremony. Lance and Dave hosted this event. I was thrilled with the reaction from the near capacity crowd. The Memphis wrestling fans really showed their appreciation to all the legends. At another point during the night, I was standing at the back of the Coliseum, taking it all in. Jerry Jarrett and Jerry Lawler came up from behind and stood on either side of me. They were both smiling ear to ear as we looked at an almost packed Mid-South Coliseum. One of them said, "Good Job, kid." That made all the hard work and stress worth it.

Monday Night Memories was successful. I did not put a lot of thought on what would be next. Even though I booked that event, I figured we would go back to me being Lawler's assistant and him continuing doing the booking. However, I called him that Wednesday to see what he had in mind for next Monday's card and the upcoming TV. He said he was happy with the Monday Night Memories idea and he thought that we had good momentum. He said that the next step needed to come from someone that was here all the time and would devote every minute to this territory. He said he had too much going on for him to be that person and that I needed to be the guy. He told me to book the upcoming cards, write the TV and figure out how to get the entire territory's business up. It did not take me long to figure out what we should do next and what direction we needed to go in. It was simple: I needed Lance Russell back for as many TV's as I could get him, I needed to continue to position Brian Christopher as the top singles babyface, and I needed to continue to establish PG-13 as a serious money drawing tag team involved in the main stories and main events. I also needed to establish strong heels. I was lucky enough to be able to get a lot of dates on Sid Vicious, so I had plans to bring in top WWE talent to work with him and involve him in a feud with Brian. I also wanted to establish a top manager. It would take me a year to find the right person, but Brandon Baxter ended up filling that role. Scott Bowden was a local friend of Brian and Kevin Lawler and he had talent and did a great job in 1994. The only thing that prevented me from using him in a bigger role was that he had a full-time job and could not work the entire territory every week. I also needed top heels and I went with Doug Gilbert and Tommy Rich. Heels are a key to the territory and this initial era after Monday Night Memories was critical and Doug and Tommy were the most critical part of the story I wanted to tell. I continued to push Tommy and Doug as a main event attraction and I had them work with PG-13, Jamie Dundee and Wolfie D, in their first main event program. I loved this program. We got months of main events out of this and we based it around personal issues. We even brought the mothers into the story as we used Peggy Gilbert, Peggy Rich and Mamma D, Wolfie's mom. I also continued the long-term story of Doug vs Brian Christopher. I wanted Gilbert vs Brian to be the current version of Lawler vs Dundee. Everybody did great and the territory business took a big jump. The television shows were compelling. Tommy and Doug had a lot of heat on them and I knew when the time was right, they would be big

babyfaces. Eventually, that did happen, and they were big time over as baby faces.

I am briefly going over the history of the territory, but at the same time, I'm also telling my story and how I evolved as Memphis wrestling developed. For a more detailed history of Memphis wrestling, I would highly recommend the books written by Mark James, Jerry Jarrett, Bill Dundee, Dutch Mantel, and Jim Cornette. Another enjoyable book is Jerry Lawler's autobiography (2001).

USWA business went up in 1994. I moved back to Nashville and was going to all the live events. I was on the road six days a week. 1995 would be the best year the Memphis wrestling territory had in about six years. The stars of the weekly TV show were Lawler, Dundee, Rich, Doug, Brandon Baxter, Miss Texas Jackie Moore, Lance Russell, and Dave Brown. Later, we did legends shows in both Louisville and Memphis. The Louisville show featured a dream tag match between two generations with PG-13 facing The Rock N Roll Express. They had a spectacular match. This match led into the Smoky Mountain vs USWA Wrestling feud. Smoky Mountain was a promotion in East Tennessee run by Jim Cornette and featured many stars that had appeared before in Memphis. The Smoky Mountain talent was positioned as heels in Memphis and we did a huge promotional war story. Eddie Marlin's wife Norma was ill at the time and Eddie stayed at home taking care of her. I became the baby face promoter spokesman for the promotion and had that role in this feud. In life, you can't get more serious than a person coming in and trying to take away your job and company. That is how this story was positioned. This story lasted the entire summer and did great business in any city that we did it. For those reading this book, not familiar with this feud, I suggest checking it out on You Tube. You can watch most of the stuff we did during that storyline. I got my ass kicked during this period, even losing a lot of blood during these beatings on several occasions. At the end of the summer, for the blow off, we went with a 12 Man "Rage in the Cage" tag match that featured 6 of our top guys, both heels and babyfaces, against their top guys. We did that match in both Memphis and Louisville and business did great.

I can't write about 1995 without going into more detail about Brandon Baxter. I write a lot about Brandon during the Power Pro Wrestling days, but I think it is important to discuss how we first met. Brandon went on to become not only one of my right-hand men in Power Pro Wrestling, but he

became one of my closest friends in the world as well. The story of how I booked him to start in USWA is funny. Brandon hates me to tell this story, but, true stories are usually pretty good. Every day at the office I would get phone calls and mail from both guys and girls that wanted to come to the USWA. One Friday, I had to leave the office early to go to Knoxville for Jim Cornette and Smoky Mountain Wrestling. I was behind on a lot of work, so I tossed my mail into my briefcase. Jamie Dundee and Wolfie D were riding with me to Knoxville. It would be a long day as I had television to do in Memphis the next day. I had to finish doing some booking on the trip, so Wolfie drove my car with Jamie in the front and me in the back. After I finished the booking, I started going through the mail. I opened an envelope with several publicity pictures and a video tape. This was the first time I had ever seen a picture of Brandon Baxter. He looked like he was 14 years old, was just as skinny as I was, plus he had long blonde hair. At first, I thought he was a girl. I read the letter and resume and learned he was asking if we had any interest in bringing him in as a manager. My first emotion after looking at the picture of this kid was that I was insulted. I showed the picture to Wolfie and Jamie and went on a rant on how this young punk had the nerve to think he could be in the wrestling business. Because I was upset, and to get a laugh, I rolled down the window, as Wolfie was driving 90 miles an hour, and threw the picture out of the window. We all got a big laugh out of that. I did not give Brandon Baxter any more thought until the following Sunday, on my day off. I opened my briefcase and saw a video tape that I had not watched. It was of Brandon Baxter. Brandon was a lot like me. He became a fan as a kid. He started out young working for the promotion in Dallas. I figured I would think the same thing about the tape as I did about the picture. Boy was I wrong. I thought this kid was great! The Memphis territory, when successful, always had a hot heel manager. I thought Brandon could be that guy. I called him immediately and we worked out a date where he would come in for a try out. Even though this could have been a one-time deal, I wanted to see what the kid could do. I put him in the mix and involved him in a storyline that went throughout the entire show against established people the viewers cared out. He argued with Lance and Dave and I had him insult both Lawler and Jimmy Valiant. The conclusion of the show left Brandon embarrassed, but it was great TV and everybody in that television station that day thought he hit a home run, including me. We offered him a full-time job. He wanted

this bad. Later I learned that Brandon skipped his high school graduation so he could move to Memphis. Brandon started full time the weekend of the 1995 Memphis and Louisville legends show. I will probably get debated on this, but I felt that Brandon Baxter was the best manager the Memphis territory had seen since Jimmy Hart. From the start, Brandon was in the main event picture as a manager and the guy was small, but athletic, and he could also work. I started a feud between the two of us that was fun to do, and considering the fact I was in the match, Brandon pulled it off and we had good matches and the viewers really believed we did not like each other. From time to time, we still revisit this feud on local shows and the people still buy it today. Brandon and I became very close and I continued to push him until 1996 when Jeff Jarrett returned to the USWA. We put Frank Morrell with Jeff as his manager as Jeff wanted Frank to be a part of his story. Unfortunately, we could not afford two managers at the time, so I had to give Brandon his notice. Even though he was young, Brandon understood that in the wrestling business, you had to change out talent to keep things fresh. If I had to do it again, I would make a different decision. Brandon left as the USWA and Smoky Mountain story line was ending. As you will read in later chapters, there was more to the story of Brandon Baxter in Memphis wrestling. Who would’ve thought that the guy I scoffed at the idea of hiring, who I had countless battles with around the territory, would one day become my right-hand man and a lifelong best friend?

Looking back, I cut off the Smoky Mountain vs USWA story earlier than I should have. Several months later, I went back to the story again but there was not much water left in the well. Around Labor Day of 1995, I knew school was about to start back and business would drop. Rick Morton, Robert Gibson, Tracy Smothers, Mark Curtis and Jim Cornette did a great job for us and drew great money. Because they were coming a longer distance, every one of them had a guarantee. I felt we could no longer afford that guarantee in the fall. Hindsight is 20-20, but this was a big mistake. I learned not to ever cut off something, especially if you did not have something else to come back with. We had been going in the right direction for almost two years, but that one decision led to a huge drop in business. I made a bad decision in booking, but I also was about to make a bad decision in my personal life.

This part of my life not only deserves its own chapter, but it deserves its own book, with all the details. Sadly, because I became so out of control, I

do not remember all the details. It would be much easier to just skip this part of my life all together, but that would not be honest. When I started this project, I did not want a bullshit book. I wanted to tell the full story. At the same time, I did not want this book to be a “tell all” book or a hatchet job on people who I might blame for my own dumb mistakes. This section will be hard to write about. This story is about the worst and most embarrassing period of my life. However, as you’re about to read, it could’ve been worse. This could have been the story of the actual end of my life. I am going to write about things I have never talked about. Some of this, my family and my closest inner circle, including those in the wrestling business, will be learning for the first time. The kids in the youth group I taught in church in the early 2000’s will be reading it for the first time. Some will be sad, some will be mad, and some will be disappointed. I hope everybody that reads this will be happy at the end of the story, because as bad as it was, it could have been much worse. I really believe, what doesn’t kill you, turns you into a better person. I sincerely think that because this happened to me. I have been a great influence on hundreds of young people’s lives. Because it happened to me, most of the time I can help a young person going through issues. This is my goal in telling this part of my story.

In 1996, I did cocaine…a lot of cocaine. I used cocaine several times a week, for three or four months. I have heard of people who did cocaine for years, some for decades. I don’t know how they did it. Using cocaine for three or four months came close to killing me. For the first 20 years of my life, I was anti drinking and drugs. But, at age 20, I started drinking beer. That led to drinking liquor. That led to smoking pot. That led to doing pills. I drank every day but never smoked or used pills on a regular basis. I was always very anti-cocaine. I knew several people who died using cocaine, including wrestlers. I made a huge mistake by doing anything with the wrestlers. I will not name names here. It serves no purpose to bury them. Some of these people are dead. Some of them have not done drugs in years. Some of them still do. I pray that those that still use drugs will quit using drugs. Drugs are no way to live. Instead of modeling myself after Jerry Lawler, who never has never had a drop of alcohol in his life or done any drugs, or at the time to Brian Christopher Lawler, who was as clean as his dad, the entire time I was running the USWA, I instead gave into temptation. Like I said, I always said no to cocaine. I realize now, there is always a trigger. All the wrestlers knew how I felt. Nobody ever talked

about doing cocaine around me and they certainly never asked me to do it. I went to a bar in Memphis one night with several wrestlers and I tried a new drink, cinnamon liquor, and it made me go nuts. I got so drunk and I was not in my right mind. A wrestling fan in the bar asked me if I wanted to do cocaine. I hadn't tried it before and had always said that I would never do it. But, that night, I did. Then I did some more. And, then I did some more after that. I was up for days and I was hooked. I wish I could add more details about the months that I was doing cocaine, but I honestly do not remember. What I do remember is that I spent most of the money that I had saved, as well as most of my future pay checks as they came, to buy more. I went broke. I continued to buy as much as I could. I knew I needed help. I should have gone to Eddie, or Jerry Lawler or Jerry Jarrett. Instead, I kept buying cocaine. As I write this, I have not done drugs of any kind in more than twenty-four years. What stopped me before it was too late? I will tell you the trigger: One night, I got back home to my apartment in Nashville from Louisville. I heard some noise and I looked outside. My 1994 Cadillac was being repossessed. My rent was due in a week and I did not have the money. I had no hope. I was scared and I thought my life was over. I jumped out of bed, grabbed a belt, and walked into my closet. I put the belt around my neck and tried to choke myself. I then grabbed a stool. I climbed up on that stool and tied the rope to the pole and had plans to kick that stool away and kill myself. I was hurting and having trouble breathing but I did not jump. Why not? I thought of my mother, the person who loved me more than anyone else. I thought of my family. I thought of Eddie and the two Jerry's. I thought of everybody who I loved and who loved me back and I thought this was bullshit, so I removed the belt, jumped off, cussed myself like a dog, and went back to bed. What saved me? It was simple: I was raised right. I had people that loved me. I made a huge mistake and I was not ready for life to end.

That was the last time I ever did drugs. A couple of days later, I saw Lawler. I told him I had been booking for three years and I was tired and burned out. I asked for a leave of absence and if he would take over the booking until I got some rest. I never told him I had a cocaine problem. I called my sister in Jonesboro. At the time, my mother still had a house in Jonesboro. I told her that I was tired, that I was taking a leave of absence and that I was coming home. I rented a U-Haul and got my ass back to Jonesboro. I surrounded myself daily with family and friends. I started

going back to church every Sunday and rehabbed myself. Luckily, it worked. I credit my real friends, my family, and especially God. I was back on the right track.

I took several months off. I finally felt I was strong enough to come back to work. Eventually, I took the booking job back over. However, while I was gone, Jerry Lawler had met a guy by the name of Larry Burton who had some big ideas. Larry came up with a big plan to have Lawler buy Jerry Jarrett's fifty percent interest in the company and then sell the entire company to a rich investor Mark Selker. All that happened. This meant that even though Jarrett had had very little hands on involvement with the company in the past several years, he was now totally gone.

Larry Burton was a very unlikeable person with no wrestling business experience at all who butted heads with almost everybody, including me. We all saw the writing on the wall. I returned the first week that Larry was in town but did not take back over the booking duties for a month or so. Dave Brown was concerned about the future of the company and how Larry Burton would affect the relationship with TV-5. Dave decided to quit the wrestling show. He would continue his duties as Chief Weathercaster for TV-5. I had a great relationship with not only Dave but TV-5 as well. I knew that with the Larry Burton involvement, as well as a new owner in Mark Selker, the future did not look good. So, for the second time in my life, I decided to quit Memphis wrestling and my dream had once again ended…at least for a while.

The end of Memphis wrestling was near, but I was not around for it. I did not want my name associated with either Burton or Selker, so I flew the coop. Towards the end of 1997, TV-5 canceled Championship Wrestling after a historic 20-year run. Because the relationship with the TV station ended, the company could not produce the show for the other markets. They lost TV in Nashville and Louisville as well. The company was out of business.

Within a brief period, Bert Prentice opened Nashville and started running that and Danny Davis and Ohio Valley Wrestling took over Louisville. Even though both men had good runs in Louisville and Nashville, it would not be the same. Memphis, the last of the great wrestling territories, was no more. However, there was light at the end of the tunnel for not only Memphis but for me as well. Memphis wrestling was meant to be, and I knew that I would be back. In just a matter of months,

Power Pro Wrestling would be launched, beginning the Power Pro Wrestling chapter of my life.

CHAPTER 4:
The Birth of Power Pro Wrestling

I was heartbroken that there was no longer any live studio wrestling on Memphis television. This was the first time that I knew of since the late 1950's that there was no live wrestling on television in Memphis. However, fans in Memphis could still get their wrestling fix, just on a national level. As wrestling fans, we were right in the middle of the Monday Night Wars where TNT TV on cable had WCW Nitro and the USA Network had WWE RAW. But it just wasn't the same. Where were Lance, Dave, Jerry Lawler, Bill Dundee, Brian Christopher, Handsome Jimmy Valiant and the wrestlers that we all grew up with? The talent was still around. The fans still wanted to see it badly. In February of 1998, I thought I was just the guy that could bring wrestling back to TV-5. I had written and produced the Memphis wrestling show for most of 1994, all of 1995 and 1996, and some in 1997. I had established a good relationship with the television station. I had stayed in contact with Dave, Corey, Lawler, Dundee and Brandon Baxter. I had talked with Lawler and, in any other circumstances he would of jumped right on opening Memphis back up, but at the time he was keeping busy with his WWE duties and also still had some issues with the previous owner of the USWA. I talked to Jerry and he assured me that he would appear on the television show as much as he could if I could land the deal. Corey Maclin and Bill Dundee both were excited and said they would love to be involved. I also talked to Dave Brown and he was interested as well, but the first step was going to be to be able to make a presentation to TV-5 and get the deal in place.

Sometime in mid-February, I was able to land a meeting with WMC General Manager Mason Granger. Mason showed interest and said he would get back to me. I waited for that call every day and I was worried that it was not going to happen. Then sometime in March, Mason asked me to meet him for lunch. During our meeting, he told me that we got the show. Not only did we get the show, but it was set to be a live show at 10am every Saturday. I mentioned in the very first chapter that the contract was for three years. That gave me some concern, but there were many times over the

years that the wrestling company and the TV-5 station had operated without a contract.

One of the first things I did was to meet with Dave Brown, and we agreed to a deal. I also was able to get commitments from Corey, Bill Dundee and Brandon Baxter. I had been impressed with Brandon ever since I brought him into the USWA in 1994. He had moved back to Dallas, but we had stayed in close contact through the years. I felt I needed a right-hand man to help with the booking and overall business. Brandon quickly agreed to come under the agreement that he would drive back and forth from Dallas every week and we would go from there.

Corey owned an advertising agency in Memphis and felt that I needed an office in Memphis. Before landing the deal, I had started helping Corey with his advertising business and was driving from my home in Jonesboro to Memphis four or five days a week. Corey suggested that since I already had a setup in his office, that we could make that the Memphis wrestling office. To my knowledge, there had never been an actual wrestling office in Memphis. As a matter of fact, even though Nick Gulas and Roy Welch had an office in Nashville, since 1977 when Jerry Jarrett took over Memphis, he worked from his home and had no official office. When Lawler would book the territory, he ended up having an office in a small building behind his house, but it wasn't an "official" office. Corey felt this would give us credibility and I agreed. I quickly transformed my office into a wrestling office and started to work. I did not have much time. I had a wrestling company to put together, talent to find, live events to set up, and had to get promotion started for the debut show.

I was informed by Mason that James Estes, our director from the USWA days, would be assigned to direct the show. Very quickly, I set up meeting with James and with the Head of Production for TV-5 Craton Armor, who was a huge believer in wrestling and had directed the show himself in the past. I also had meetings with the programming department. We needed to make sure that the viewers knew we were coming back. Director James Estes did a great job coming up with plans to produce the commercial where we would announce the start date of the program. But first, we needed a name. I had a list of at least 50 names for the new promotion. I wanted to incorporate Memphis in the title, but in case the show got picked up in other markets, I was not married to that idea. WMC was owned by Raycom Media, who owned a bunch of individual stations. Throughout our

entire run, I wanted to be syndicated on the Raycom stations. We came close many times, but we never got a deal finalized. I finally went with the name “Memphis Power Pro Wrestling”, which was later changed to just “Power Pro Wrestling.” I wish I could remember exactly who named the show “The Power Hour.” I am thinking it might have been Dave Brown or Brandon Baxter, but it fit, and the show quickly became known as the Power Hour. I loved it then and I love it now. While working to promote the show, we taped several promo videos. In one set, TV-5 went to Lawler’s house and shot some footage and put a great spot together. But, the one spot that I thought put us over the top was the one we did at Dave Brown’s home. Dave lived (and still lives) in Lakeland, TN, a few miles from Memphis. Dave and his lovely wife Margaret loved going out on the lake behind his home. So, we designed a spot where Bill Dundee and I, along with a few other young wrestlers, would go out on a pontoon boat looking for Dave and Corey. To this day, I remember that Dave’s wife drove the boat. We found Dave and Corey on a fishing boat. Dundee then yelled out that the wrestling show was coming back. We helped them get onto our boat and off we went. The voiceover guy that did that spot announced the April 18th start date and said TV-5 wrestling was back. Once that spot aired, we were off and running and we got great response.

Live events were always a big part of Memphis wrestling. The reason we were successful was that we had so many live events, especially in larger markets like Nashville, Evansville and Louisville. I knew those markets were no longer an option for us to run shows in. I also knew that due to the great success of the cable TV programs on USA and TNT that I did not think we would have a chance of being successful running live events on Mondays, or any other night, on a weekly basis. Lawler had already been promoting weekly shows at a Casino so I made a deal with him where they would pay Power Pro Wrestling a booking fee and I would book the shows and advertise them on the TV show. I decide to run occasional events in Memphis, but would also promote in Arkansas, Mississippi, Southeast Missouri, and West Tennessee. I needed someone to promote the live events and was able to reach a deal with Buddy Wayne, who was a long-time spot show promoter. Buddy was able book a couple of months’ worth of events, usually on Friday and Saturday nights. On Thursday nights, we would have the regular casino show. We were able to get a very good financial deal with the TV station. We also had other

options with the TV station to create additional revenue. I knew early on that this promotion would not be the traditional promotion in the way Memphis wrestling had always been run. This was not a full-blown territory. I had to think of new ways to generate revenue.

We had to make a first impression right from the start. I started getting the talent for that show confirmed. I knew I was ahead of the game as I had Lawler and Dundee, arguably the two biggest names in the history of Memphis wrestling. I knew I could also have Brian Christopher anytime he was off on Saturdays. I also started going to the weekly casino shows and several independent shows around the area. I contacted former USWA talent that still lived in the area, mainly in Nashville. Word quickly spread that Power Pro Wrestling was coming, and I had visits at the office from many of the local talent. The one guy that impressed me the most and who I liked right away was Derrick King, who appeared on almost all of the Power Pro Wrestling shows but also still appears on independent shows today and who is the biggest of our home-grown Power Pro talent. Thanks to Bill Dundee for recommending DK. I also went with Dundee and visited Danny Davis' Ohio Valley Wrestling. I contacted Jim Cornette, who was still working at Titan Towers in Stanford, CT for the WWE. With Lawler's current involvement with WWE and by reaching out to Cornette, we were quickly able to start a working relationship with the biggest wrestling company in the world.

I felt I needed one more piece to the puzzle. Even though most of my inner circle thought I was making a mistake, I felt I needed a top heel with a proven track record of drawing money in Memphis. That person was Austin Idol. Idol, one of the best talkers ever, looked like a million dollars and had drawn big money everywhere he had worked. At the time, Idol lived in Florida. We came to terms on what I thought was a very good money deal, with him being given a guarantee per night, plus a sizeable percentage of each booking he made. I was confident with Idol and confident in making the deal. I knew that in the past, Austin Idol had issues with other promoters over money, including Lawler and Jarrett, but I felt we needed Idol much more than he needed us and that it was worth the risk. I was able to book him for every Friday and Saturday in April and May. I purchased his ticket, mailed it to him and he was good to go.

There was only so much you could do with the TV station, but I wanted the show to have as much of a fresh look as it could. In the past, the

audience was seated in benches with the announce desk to the side on the floor. I wanted to put bleachers on two sides of the ring and I wanted to put a riser with the announce desk on it, right across from the hard camera. I also wanted Power Pro banners on the ring and Power Pro signs on both the announce desk and hung from the lighting grill in the studio. It was a fresh look and I was very happy with it. I knew we could not afford to be RAW or Nitro, but the wrestling world had changed, and we had to pick up our production values where we could.

The date of the first show was set for April 18, 1998 and we got great promotion, not only from the TV channel, but from other media outlets as well. Because we were going with a distinctive look on the studio and had quite a few wrestlers who had never been on TV before, I decided to have a production meeting the Friday night before our debut. Lawler and Dundee both did radio interviews that day as well. I risked every bit of money I had saved on this project and had to borrow money to fund it, as well, and I knew this would work. I did not lose a second of sleep about this until around Tuesday the week of the first show. I got a call from Mason Granger of TV-5 and he had some bad news for me. I mentioned Mark Selker in one of the early chapters. He had his lawyers contact TV-5 and he said that he owned USWA and they would sue if TV-5 put our show on the air. Obviously, this was a different company, with a new name and an entirely different business plan. We had a different strategy in how the TV show was written and produced. Neither me, Dave, nor Corey had worked for him after he bought the USWA. We had a lot of wrestlers booked on the show that had never even wrestled on *any* television program. But, at this point, I was just working with a handshake deal. We had not signed an actual contract. I was afraid that the parent company of TV-5, Raycom, would be hesitant to get into a program deal where they were under a threat of being sued before the first show ever aired. You can imagine my emotions at the time. But, by Thursday, Mason called me to the station and said if they had to fight a lawsuit, they would fight a lawsuit. So, that day, I signed a three-year deal. It was back to business.

Our production meeting went great. Everybody was so excited. My old referee friend from Louisville came to be one of the referees for the first show. Corey picked Austin Idol up at the airport and he was in a great mood. He loved the studio’s new look and seemed to be very excited. I was also very excited. It was a long way and many years from that first

Memphis television show I watched like a kid. I didn't get much sleep that Friday night as I was just hours away from the first show.

It was 10 AM on Saturday, April 18th, 1998. The studio was packed with fans. The video started running with local Memphis footage. The announcer said, "Memphis, Tennessee…known worldwide for the beautiful sites of the Mississippi river, for being the birthplace of the blues, for being the home of the King of Rock 'N Roll Elvis Presley, and for being the professional wrestling capital of the world. Welcome to Memphis Power Pro Wrestling!" I was upstairs, like I would be so many times at airtime, and I had chills and maybe some tears. We had finally made it.

After the audio, Dave and Corey opened the show. The crowd reacted loudly. We even did a balloon drop. It was great and set the tone of a new beginning. I wanted to have a special main event to promote at the beginning of the show. In the promotion for the show, I needed a marquee match. I grew up watching Jerry Lawler vs Bill Dundee. I saw the Hair Matches. I saw the manager get his head shaved. I saw Dundee get his head shaved. I even saw Bill's wife Beverly get her head shaved! I saw three loser leaves town matches. This was my favorite of all time. and I badly wanted this match on the first show. I don't regret the decision to have this match at all. I still felt I needed something else. I should have already learned the lesson before, but I should never have booked this as "The Final Confrontation." They had already wrestled each other and feuded for twenty years. Then I booked this as "The Final Confrontation." What was I thinking? They delivered and had a great match, but I did not deliver when, just a month or so later, they were at it again. Oh well. You live and learn. We hyped that match heavy in Dave and Corey's open. I then went with The Spellbinder and Paul Diamond in the first ever Power Pro Wrestling television match. The crowd was great, and they had a great match that set the tone I wanted for the match as well as for the promotion. The match made sense, was fast paced and looked hard hitting. I was happy with the match.

Then, it was my turn. I was introduced as the owner of Power Pro Wrestling. I was somewhat emotional, but also thrilled to death as I laid out my plans for Memphis wrestling. I had spent so much time on everything else on the show that I did not realize I hadn't put any thought at all into my interview. All I knew was what I wrote on the format, and that was, "RH tells his plans for Power Pro". I really had nothing in my head to say but I

knew my story, I knew the Memphis wrestling story and I knew what I wanted Power Pro Wrestling to become in order to be successful. I knew we had to do this for the fans. That is what I said, and I was happy with the reaction from the fans in attendance. We then went to break with a pre-taped interview from Jim Cornette. I used my friendship with Cornette here and our relationship with the WWE. I felt this would give us more credibility if we had interviews from national known stars to give comments for the first show. I thank Jimmy for doing this for us. Later in the PPW run, Jim would come into Power Pro, first as my partner, then as my enemy. This interview accomplished exactly what I wanted it to.

Austin Idol was next after the first break. I believe this was his first appearance at the TV-5 studio since 1986 or 1987. He got a great reaction. His interview was right on and could not have been better. He said he was insulted that he was back in Memphis after all these years and, just like before, all the talk was about Jerry Lawler and Bill Dundee. We then went with a Dundee pre-taped interview and then to the second break of the show.

It was then time for the third segment, and it was time for the first Power Pro appearance of The King, Jerry Lawler. I put a lot of thought in the format for this show. I probably ended up going through ten formats, if not more. I wanted to make sure the order was right and made sense. In today's wrestling world, you hear a lot of talk about scripts. Back then, we certainly did not have word for word scripts, or even written interviews or written match lay outs. We had formats that listed announcer intros, interviews, videos and matches with segment times that we were planning for. I saved Lawler for the third segment just to milk it out a little and have people ready for it. I wanted something big that the fans could remember. I knew my limitations as well as my budget. We had an actual king's throne and we had guys carry Lawler out to the studio on the throne. Stacy came out with him and handed out autographed pictures of the King. Lawler did a great interview and hyped his match with Dundee for later in the show. He also mentioned Idol's comments. Lawler stayed to do commentary for the next match. I knew that to be successful we needed to build the young generation of Memphis wrestling. This is where we introduced that division of Power Pro. We called it in Young Guns Division. I knew from the beginning I was going to go with Tony Williams as the star of this division. Tony started his career as the tag partner of Brian Christopher. Tony

changed his name to Kid Wikkid. In this match, we went with an eight-man tag match that had Tony, Jason Lee, Sgt. O'Reilly and Derrick King against Lance Jade, Bobby Bronze, Blade and Kevin Lawler as the Yellow Jacket. Tony, Derrick, Jade, Bronze and Blade all made a lot of appearances in this division with Derrick and Blade here for almost the entire run of the show. This match was designed as a showcase for the division, but especially for Tony and Derrick and I thought they did a fantastic job. We then had a Lawler vs Dundee confrontation to hype the main event then went with a pre-taped interview of the Rock N Roll Express. We ended the segment going to a break.

After commercial, we showed an interview from Brian Christopher taped the day before. It was a funny interview. Brian showed up at the studio only to find that there was no ring. He tried to set the ring up before Dave came from his weather office to tell him he had the wrong day. Brian said he would be in studio next Saturday. Good segment. That was followed by a Billy Travis match against Ashley Hudson. I had always loved Billy. He was a great heel and a very good worker. I had plans for him to be a regular foil for Lawler, Dundee and Stacy. They had a really good match.

It was then time for the TV main event, The Final Confrontation between Jerry Lawler and Bill Dundee. It was a great main event, but it certainly wasn't their final confrontation. Shame on me. To make this match even more important, Austin Idol came out to do commentary. I thought they had their regular great match. This was a two-segment match. We never did that much in the USWA, unless it was an expiration of time match, but with the one hour running time of Power Pro, we did it often. At the end of the match, the referee was knocked down. Idol interfered and caused Dundee to lose the match. When he first came out, Idol had brought an open contract out with him. After he caused Dundee to lose, he left the studio but left the contract behind. We ended the show with Dundee signing the contract and Dave plugging the TV main event for next week as Dundee vs Idol. We had our second main event ready…or so I thought.

I thought the show went better than I ever expected it would. You have just one chance to make a first impression and I thought this show delivered. I had several goals for the show. I wanted to make sure we got a check mark for every goal:

1. I wanted a fresh new look. Check.

2. I wanted the studio to be set up where the crowd looked bigger and sounded louder. Check.
3. I wanted to establish that the classic stars of Memphis wrestling would be in a featured role. Check.
4. I wanted to establish this as a show for Memphis. Check.
5. I wanted to establish we would have a relationship with the WWE. Check.
6. I wanted to establish the Young Guns Division and point out we were looking for the future stars of not only Memphis, but all of wrestling. Check
7. I wanted to feature marquee matches every week and eliminate squash matches, as much as possible. Check.
8. Without having a Memphis live event every Monday to have to save matches for the house shows, I wanted to set up a formula where we established episodic programming where we could begin a program on the television show and give these stories a conclusion on future shows. I wanted to establish this from the beginning. Check.
9. I wanted to establish that Dave Brown was the moral compass of the show. Check.
10. Finally, I wanted the viewer to expect the unexpected. That was maybe the most important thing to me. Check.

I had already worked on the rough drafts on the next three or four Power Hours. Little did I know that plan would change before we ever got back to TV-5 for the next show. One thing I did know was that I had the first Mid-South Coliseum card coming soon and everything was on the line. I knew from day one that the success or failure of Power Pro Wrestling would depend on the success or failure of that first Coliseum show. I had a big meeting coming up just two days later in Nashville. I awaited that meeting Monday with a great feeling about our first show and great hopes for that Nashville trip.

I was happy with all the great feedback about the show. Everybody was thrilled, including Dave, Lawler, Dundee, and the management of the TV station.

I did get some bad news the day before. Mason Granger, the TV-5 General Manager who signed the deal, announced shortly after signing that

he was leaving TV-5 and would be replaced by a Raycom manager from another market. The new manager had a reputation of being a hard ass and I was sad Mason was going away. I was invited to a going away dinner for Mason Friday before our production meeting. I had no idea what kind of ratings we would get for the show. Wrestling had been off the air for months and we had something new to deal with. In the past, all we got was quarterly ratings but now we would get overnight ratings. We ended up getting over a 7 and everybody was thrilled. Day one was a success. Now, upward and onward, somebody say!

CHAPTER 5:

The Blast Off in The Dome

My business plan at this time was to continue to build a working relationship with the WWE, to build the weekly Thursday night casino shows at Lady Luck, to run live events on Friday and Saturday nights and to start building to a big show in June at the Mid-South Coliseum. The key to everything was to deliver the best weekly television program that we could. I set up a meeting with Beth Wade, the manager of the Mid-South Coliseum. Beth had come to Memphis years before to take over running the Coliseum. In year's past, the Coliseum managers were all very helpful and saw the value of weekly wrestling shows in the building. Beth…not so much. I would say that she was the hardest to work with of any of the Coliseum managers in history. With that said, I don't remember any issues in the past between us. Even though she had the best interests of the Coliseum in mind, she made it much harder to produce a product that the fans were used to seeing. One of the main things people expected from the Monday night matches were classic wild and crazy matches that would end up all over the building. I understand that was a liability issue, but Beth wanted to limit the action outside the ring. At first, she wanted us to keep all the action inside the ring. However, she changed that to saying we could not go out of the barricades. She had it added to the contract that the wrestling company would be fined $1000 if that happened. I am not saying that was the only reason, but the enjoyment level of the matches was at an all-time low. They became tame. I remember one night in 1996, we had a grudge match booked between Bill Dundee and Wolfie D, of PG-13. The feud was based on a real-life issue between the two. It ended with a situation where Dundee had pulled a knife on Wolfie in a dressing room in Ripley, TN. I made the decision to terminate Dundee the next day before TV. Dundee was away for several months but the heat had blown over and we all felt that we could do business with a feud between the two. When you can introduce real life issues into a wrestling show, it almost always works. I remember the first match they had. It was great, and we needed it to be a wild fight. They brawled back to a section of seats that were blocked off and fought up there. They fought down a barricaded aisle and fought in

a section that was closed to the public. As the booker, I approved this. The next week, Beth Wade fined us for having that brawl. The invoice was sent to Jarrett Promotions, but I remember the bookkeeper decided to deduct the money out of Bill's and Wolfie's checks. I told Bill and Wolfie that since I approved it, I would pay the fine. We finally decided to split the fine three ways. It ended up resolved and the Bill and Wolfie feud ended up being the best program done in Memphis in years for a single feud. I don't regret getting the fine at all. By the time PPW was formed, this was all in the past. I knew that in order to run a successful show in Memphis that it would have to be at the Coliseum. I also knew that there was no way we could run successful shows in that big of a building every week. I also knew that because of the Monday Night Wars between WCW and WWE that Mondays were about the worst night for a wrestling card you could possibly have. So, I met with Beth and we agreed to two dates, June 23 and July 21.

With the contract signed, I knew I had to create the card, book the talent and use the next seven- or eight-weeks' worth of television to start building for the event. My initial idea for the main event for the show, which I named "Blast off in the Dome," was Austin Idol verses Jerry Lawler. I had started issues between the two on our very first TV show and I was going to continue the build on our second TV show, which was to air June 25. I use this example when people complain there is no long-term planning in most wrestling promotions. That is just not true. Plans can change, through no fault of the wrestling promoter or the booker and things were about to change in a very big way. One thing I learned a long time ago was that sometimes, even most times, things can change for the best.

I was ready for show number two on April 25. We had promoted a TV main event that we had set up on the first show of Bill Dundee vs Austin Idol. We were going to involve Lawler in the match and keep telling the Lawler and Idol story until we got to the Mid-South Coliseum card on June 23. Buddy Wayne had booked a live event show in West Tennessee on Friday, April 24, 1998. Austin Idol was booked on that card and booked for both TV the next day and the live event Saturday night. Idol and I talked on the phone earlier in the day and it was decided that I would pick him up at the airport. I felt we had a great show lined up for TV with the Dundee vs Idol match, the debut of Brandon Baxter and the big angle planned for Lawler involving Idol. I drove to the airport and waited for Idol. He never got off the plane. I called his house, but there was answer. I stayed at the

airport for hours, but still no Idol, so I left for the live event. I continued to try to call Idol but still got no response. I got back to Memphis later that night and checked into the motel. I remember talking to Lawler on the phone to get his advice on how to move forward. I remember him saying that I should have known better and that Idol had done this before. We talked about what to do and Lawler suggested that I go out on TV and be honest with the viewers and tell them that Idol did not show up, that we did not know why, but that we would move on. After that call, I remember getting a call from Brandon Baxter, who had driven from Dallas to make his first appearance on Power Pro Wrestling the next day. Brandon had checked into a room at the hotel I was staying at, so I asked him to come to my room and he helped me as I wrote an entirely new show for the next morning. It wasn't the first time, and certainly wouldn't be the last, that I had to rewrite a show at the last minute.

We were only at the second show and we already had to change direction. I had a lot of money invested in the June 23rd Coliseum show, and now I did not have a direction. It is always great to have a plan, but I have found out in wrestling that quite often, the best stuff just happens organically. We had our good guys in Lawler, Dundee, Brian Christopher and more. Back then, and when done correctly, even still today, the best wrestling stories portray good vs evil. I had plenty of the good but did not have an evil for the good King to have a reason to hate. I will be honest-Idol was going to be that person. I was without a heel to combat Lawler. I had thought all night about it and had discussions with everybody on who that villain could be. I had thought about Dundee, but I felt that at that point in his career, even though he could still be a great heel, people did not want to boo a legend. As I walked out for my interview on the show, I still had no clue what we were going to do. Then, as they say, 'shit happens' and sometimes things are meant to be. Once again, I did not think much about my interview. I was always better if I knew what my purpose was for the interview and I would feed off the crowd and just do it. The purpose of the interview was to announce that Austin Idol, while he had been promoted to be on the show, would not be there. Like Lawler suggested, I was honest to the people. I hated the fact that on just our second show, we had promoted someone who would not be there. I said my peace, then, as scheduled, Jerry Lawler came out to respond. We did not talk about how we were going to handle it, but the general idea was that Lawler would talk about Idol

running his mouth about him last week and then interfering in his match, only to then not have the guts to show up this week. I thought it went well, but I was surprised by what Lawler said next. The King said, “Randy, I hate to say this, but what I’m about to say is true. I told you so! Why in the world would you bring in Austin Idol? He has a history. Why would you do this, Randy??” I was shocked by the reaction from the fans. Immediately they started agreeing with Lawler and started voicing support for what Lawler had said. So, I answered, “I booked Idol because I am the founder, owner and president of Power Pro Wrestling and I do what I want to do!” I had reacted on the fly in a tough situation and the people turned on me quicker than anything. We had a few more words and then the interview ended. I walked off the set to a chorus of boos from the studio audience. This wasn’t supposed to happen. I had been the good guy authority figure, modeled after Eddie Marlin, for years. They had cheered me last week. They cheered me when I came out for the interview. Then, they turned on me. As I walked out of the studio, I saw Lawler and said, “Now we have our direction and we have the heel for you.” I decided that I would be the lead foil for Lawler. Remember, back in the 80’s, the biggest story we had was between Lawler and his manager, Jimmy Hart. Lawler was trying to run Hart out of town and Jimmy was trying to do the same. I would be in that role. A lot of people were saying that I was trying to copy Vince McMahon or Eric Bischoff. People said I was just trying to make myself a TV star, that I just wanted TV time. I heard a lot. But here is the deal. That was not it at all. It was never, ever a plan for me to be the heel to feud with Lawler. We were in a negative position where we had lost the person who was going to be the lead heel, and due to that unrehearsed interview, I became that person. I learned years ago that you had to listen to the people, and I had heard the people loud and clear: I had the right guy…me. The next step was to find the right opponent for Lawler for June 23 at the Mid-South Coliseum show.

The WWE was in Nashville doing RAW in May a few weeks later. Jim Cornette was working for WWE and oversaw dealing with independent promotions interested in booking talent. WWE also had a great relationship with Jerry Lawler, and I had close relations with several in the company as well. I met with Cornette, Jim Ross and visited with Vince for a few minutes. I was able to come to agreement with several of the talents and secured them for the June 23 show. For the main event, my dream match

was Lawler vs Kane. Kane was a red-hot character on WWE television and was involved in main event feuds with both The Undertaker and Steve Austin. It was a trip worth making because before I left to drive back to Memphis, I had booked Kane, The Rock N Roll Express, Bob Holly and Bart Gunn with Jim Cornette as the "New Midnight Express" and Road Dogg Jesse James. All I needed to do was to incorporate that talent with our local wrestlers and we had a damn good crew going into the Coliseum show.

We still had work to do to get to this event. I knew we had to have great television leading up to the big show. We had to have an effective way to make the Lawler vs Kane match promotion interesting and for it to make sense. We also needed somebody that could be at every television leading up to that match on the heel side to make the match happen. We had accidently started the Lawler vs Randy feud and that seemed to be the best way of killing two birds with one stone. It allowed us to make the Lawler vs Kane match seem interesting but at the same time use me to do that and advance the Lawler and Randy story.

Starting with show #3, we were establishing the Young Guns division, telling the story of Miss Jackie and Derrick King, featuring Bill Dundee, introducing Miss Samantha, aligning Brandon Baxter with Billy Travis and getting heat on them by having Billy repeatedly smash guitars over people's heads. We established Stacy Carter and Jerry Lawler as a couple on air, starting the after the Blast story of Stacy and Lawler against Brandon and Billy Travis, and of course, our main story was adding fuel to my story with Lawler and involving Stacy in the story. I would act more like an asshole to where every week Lawler would be getting madder and madder. I made it personal when I made some very mean comments about Stacy.

I also knew we were coming back with another Mid-South Coliseum show on July 21st. I knew before we got to the June 23rd event that I was going to main event with Lawler against a WWE talent again in July. I also knew that I had The Rock coming back to Memphis to defend his Intercontinental title against Brian Christopher. I also had a name for the event, The Malice in The Palace. See, we did long term planning in Memphis. Some of the time, it just didn't work out. This time it did.

Most of my thoughts during May and the first of June were put into the Blast Off show. We needed the right way to get to the Kane match. It started with every week tension being higher between me, Lawler and Stacy. We

had two TV's left before the big show. We hyped the match over 4 shows. We did this on shows 7, 8, 9 and 10. On show 7, we ended the episode with me being mad at Lawler and Stacy, so I announced the Blast Off In The Dome Main Event as Lawler vs Kane. Due to Kane's monster character on WWE TV at the time, Stacy came out almost in tears and ended up slapping the shit out of me as we went off the air. Show #8 had Stacy suspended because of her slapping me. We continued to hype the match. As I was out bragging and saying Lawler could not handle Kane, Lawler came out to confront me. He said he had a message from Stacy as he slapped the shit out of me, about ten times as hard as Stacy had slapped me. The people couldn't have thought this was phony because Lawler really laid it in, and it hurt like hell. On Show #9, we spent time setting up other matches on the show. Lawler and Stacy were not in the studio, but we recapped last week with a video and I did a promo for the match and we had a video interview from Kane and Paul Bearer. A Kane match from WWE TV was also shown. More hype on the go home show, Show #10. We showed more Kane action with a Kane vs Undertaker WWE match. Lawler did a live money interview. Kid Wikkid came out to close the show by saying Lawler did not have the mean streak anymore to face a giant like Kane. Right before we went off the air Lawler came out and threw fire at Wikkid.

I really enjoyed this entire build up. First, remember, in the past, I had never had that many weeks to sell a match. I was a booker of a weekly territory so normally we had one week to hype a match. This was fun, being a heel was fun, and working with Lawler and Stacy was fun. I was not experienced personally doing stuff to help draw money. I had plenty of experience booking it but none where I was an important part of the story as an on-air character. Lawler is so damn good. No matter how unexperienced I was, it could not fail with Lawler being the person I was feuding with. He was great in everything he did, and he was great in leading me through all the stuff we did.

The promotional hype was on a full court press. We bought spots on both radio and TV. Corey Maclin came up with buying an advertising package to have a huge Blast Off Banner on all the city buses. That was a great idea and helped hype the show. The card was finalized. Here was the final lineup:

Lance Jade and Bobby Bronze vs Bobby Doll and Jess Dalton
PPW Young Guns Title: Kid Wikkid VS James Gibson

Jackie VS Derrick King

I am going to back track before I finish talking about the rest of the card. Jackie Moore was a lady wrestler from Texas. She was originally introduced back in 1989 as Miss Texas when they were doing the Texas vs Tennessee promotional war. Jackie started off as a villain (heel) but ended up becoming a fan favorite (baby face). Jackie was one tough young lady. The fans believed she was tough, and she was. They believed she could beat up most of the lady wrestlers in the world and could beat some male wrestlers, too. She became quite popular and helped draw money. She became so popular that she eventually signed a contract with WCW and left the USWA, which was the promotion before Power Pro. But, by the time Power Pro was formed, she had been released from WCW and was back living at home in Dallas. Brandon Baxter lived in the Dallas area as well. Jackie had the goal of being in the WWE and she knew Memphis was the perfect place to have the WWE eyes on her. So, we talked, came to a deal, and she agreed to drive up from Dallas with Brandon every week. I had the feeling that the WWE would grab her quickly and they did, but not before we were able to get some great television from her. For those of you that are reading that may be friends or school mates with me, you probably can't understand how poplar and how great Jackie was. Her appearances really added to the Power Pro roster. She was sexy, beautiful and tough. Our fans really loved her, and she connected big time with our audience. At the same time, we did not have a lot of woman opponents for her, so I decided to have her against Derrick King in her match at the Blast Off. Normally I did not like intergender matches, but at the time, Derrick was a young man and very small. He was great in the ring, but I did not think our fans would have trouble believing that Jackie could beat up Derrick because in real life, she could have. We still had to get into the story in a logical way. I wanted it to make sense and I wanted the story to be humorous, intriguing and interesting as well as being believable. I needed for it to also be easy to understand and get invested in. I also wanted it to be a match that our fans would pay to see. Derrick was the perfect choice. We had featured him in our Young Guns division, but I felt this program would take him to the next level. I knew Jackie would not be around forever, but I hoped Derrick would. I learned from Jerry Jarrett, Jerry Lawler and Bill Dundee that the best wrestling matches were based on reality or at least presented with enough realism that people could suspend their disbelief. I would constantly

talk to the young wrestlers and new talent that would come in so that I could learn things about them that I might could use later in storylines. This was the case with Derrick. He once told me when he was in high school, he was a huge fan and he had a big crush on Miss Texas. I thought we could make this a very interesting story. Jackie made her first appearance on Power Pro Wrestling on our third show, May 2, and we did not waste any time involving Jackie and Derrick together. At that time, and probably even today, Derrick was funny and goofy as he could be and that was how he was portrayed on TV. We did all kinds of crazy things with Derrick over the Power Pro run, but we started it from the get-go. Derrick was doing a thing where he called himself "Mr. Personalities," where each week he would portray a different legendary character from the wrestling world. One week he was Shawn Michaels. The next week he was Jerry Lawler. He tried to think of as many people as he could to copy. The viewers liked it and even though it was not meant to be a major story, it was unique, often funny, and it helped get attention on Derrick. So, after the first two shows we had, people wanted to see more from Derrick. It did not matter that he was young and tiny. He wasn't exactly beating up Jerry Lawler or Bill Dundee. The show did not need to be all blood and guys brawling all the time. We had great legends, but we needed youth. Yes, you needed to be able to get it done in the ring and Derrick could do that also. He was a natural. I felt adding Jackie to the roster was a big deal and on May 2nd the fans agreed with me. She received a great response from the studio audience and that show ended up doing a great rating, as well. We had eight weeks' worth of television to build to the Derrick vs Jackie match, and we started that build on May 2nd. Jackie was winding up her interview when Derrick came out and made it clear that he thought she was great and that he admired her. Because we had to draw this story out until June, we also involved Bill Dundee's valet/wife Samantha in the situation as well. Derrick acted like a peace maker as Samantha and Jackie brawled. We really turned this into a soap opera the next week when Derrick came out and asked Jackie to marry him. Derrick did a fantastic job in this and was dressed up in a tuxedo. Derrick was jumping up and down and thrilled to death when Jackie said yes. Jackie said she would do this if he would prove to her he was a man. Derrick was funny in his response and said he could not do that because they were on live television. She made it clear that all Derrick had to do to prove that he was a man was to beat her in a match on June 23rd. He

agreed, so the match was set. We followed up every week and when the match happened at the Coliseum on June 23, the fans were ready. They had a great match, which was won by Jackie, of course, who did not have to marry Derrick. The story was over, but it ended up being great for Power Pro Wrestling.

The Rock N Roll Express vs The New Mid Night Express w/Jim Cornette

Bill Dundee, King Mabel, Ashley Hudson and Handsome Jimmy Valiant vs Tracy Smothers, Tony Falk, Master B, Koko B. Ware and BJ Awesome in an Anything Goes Street Fight

Jeff Jarrett vs Billy Joe Travis w/Brandon Baxter

I will discuss Billy in detail later, but Billy first appeared in Memphis wrestling in 1985 and ended up forming a tag team with Frank Morrell. In 1986, Billy formed a tag team with Jeff Jarrett, and they became very popular and drew money. At that time, they were the most popular team in the company since The Fabulous Ones in my opinion. By the time of the Blast Off show, Jeff had left his father's promotion here in Memphis and had become Double J in the WWE. On my trip to Nashville, Jeff was one of the people I wanted for this show. Jeff had begun carrying out a guitar and was bashing everybody over the head. Billy started calling himself the Sweet Music Man and he was doing the guitar bashing on Power Pro Wrestling as well. So, this was a battle of former partners, both of who bashed guitars over people's head. In his interviews, Billy said that Jeff betrayed him by leaving for bigger money and he was going to beat Jeff and let the entire world know he was the best wrestler. They had a great match. Brandon Baxter's interference backfired, then Jeff busted the guitar over Brandon's head and ended up winning the match. After the match I wanted to do a deal to build for a return of Jeff in the future. Nature Boy Buddy Landel came out and attacked Jeff and left him laid out. I wish we wouldn't have done this because we were never able to get Jeff back to take advantage. Rest in Peace to Buddy Landel.

Jerry Lawler vs Kane w/Jim Cornette

This was the match that the people came to see, no doubt about it. Paul Bearer was scheduled to come to Memphis and be in the corner of Kane for this match. However, Paul had transportation issues and was not able to make it. Jim Cornette had already appeared with the New Midnight Express

earlier in the night, but he agreed to also manage Kane in the main event. I thought Kane and Lawler had a great match and people got their money's worth. The match ended with all the fans leaving happy when the King threw fire at Kane and ended the match.

An interesting side note: On the Friday before the event, Beth Wade from the Mid-South Coliseum called. She was worried because we had only sold 600 tickets and she wanted to know if I wanted to cancel the event. I knew two things: that we had one more TV and that the ringside was almost sold out. I also knew that historically, Memphis was a walk-up town for wrestling, so I was not worried. Everything was on the line, but I did not think twice. I thought the show went great. The box office was busy all day. We ended up selling almost 5,000 tickets. It was official: the first big show for Power Pro Wrestling was an enormous success.

We all know we could not celebrate for long. Not only did we have another Coliseum show to do, I had known for a couple of weeks that we had another huge event before that and that it would be historic as well. It would also be completely different from the Coliseum show and the first of its kind.

CHAPTER 6:

THE RUMBLE ON THE RIVER (The first and only live local wrestling prime time show on TV-5 in history)

At this point in the story, we had produced ten live television shows, multiple smaller live events and we were just coming off a very successful Mid-South Coliseum event. I had known since late April that we would follow up the first Coliseum show with a second show in July. Before we even got to the June 23 Coliseum show, I got a phone call from Channel Five that changed my plans…in a good way. Wrestling had been broadcast live from a studio for decades. The show had moved around time slots, starting off on Saturday afternoons before gradually moving to a Saturday morning airtime. This move introduced Memphis wrestling to an entire new group of people who put eyes on Memphis wrestling for the first time. This built a generation of new fans who would pass the tradition of watching wrestling down to younger generations. Wrestling was for all ages. Therefore, I was so happy when Mason Granger finally notified me back in March that he was giving us the traditional Saturday morning time slot, which had always been successful for Memphis wrestling. Never in a million years did I expect the next request that TV-5 made to me. TV-5 had established the 4th of July Star Spangled Celebration for years on the banks of the mighty Mississippi River at Tom Lee Park. They were calling to see if I would be interested in producing a live show at Tom Lee Park on Saturday, July 4, 1998. (Writers note: Ironically, I am writing this chapter on July 4, 2018, in the office downstairs at King Jerry Lawler's Hall of Fame Bar and Grille, not far away from Tom Lee Park.) The kicker was, instead of the normal time slot, they wanted the show to air in prime time, at 7PM. They wanted a blow away show, and they even agreed to triple PPW's fee for producing it. I had chills. I was so excited. Up to that point, I would say my favorite show that I had ever booked was the March 9, 1994 Monday Night Memories Legends show. My second favorite show ever would have to be Blast Off in the Dome show. My favorite TV show was the Monday Night Memories hype show on March 7, 1994 which is where

Lance Russell returned to Memphis television for the first time in five years. That was the television show and live event shows that ended up giving me the chance to become the Memphis booker. I beamed with pride when Eddie Marlin told me that Jerry Jarrett had called him from New York that Saturday morning, March 7, and told him it was the best wrestling television show he had ever seen. Those were big words and I loved the show as well. I produced the next three years of television and there were many shows that I loved and many shows that ended up drawing great crowds at the box office. But, as soon as I knew we had this opportunity, I knew we had a chance for this show to be something special.

I needed to plan this show quickly. It is not easy to put this kind of show together at the last minute. First, I needed a reason to have a live show on the 4th of July at Tom Lee Park. I would love to tell you that the idea that we ended up was my brainstorm. But, to tell you the truth, it has been twenty years ago. I have no idea. I do know that I would have listened to any ideas from Lawler, Dundee, Dave, and Brandon. I would also listen to any ideas from TV-5. I did know that the show needed to have a patriotic theme, we needed it to be packed with action and that we needed to introduce Lawler's opponent for the upcoming Mid-South Coliseum show later that month. We chose the television program on June 20th to make the announcement. Each week we continued to have Brandon Baxter go out and do interviews to get some heat. On this show, right before we did his segment, we ran a commercial promoting the 4th of July celebration. Brandon came out and started yelling at the announcers that he had arrived at the studio without being told he was not scheduled on the show. He said we were wasting time by showing the 4th of July commercial and that he should have been scheduled instead of that commercial. Brandon started arguing with the announcers and did a strong interview running down the United States. The Vice-President of TV-5 had had enough. Creighton Armour was a veteran and he was the perfect person for this role. Dave and Corey introduced him, and he and Brandon ended up in a huge argument. At this point, I was established as a strong heel. But, in this situation, Brandon was yelling at the Vice President of TV-5, so I came out to defend the honor of America and Creighton. I ended up immediately telling Brandon Baxter he was fired. Well, Creighton had a better idea. He proposed that on July 4th, TV-5 would add our live wrestling show to the 4th of July Celebration. He told me not to fire Brandon, but to instead make

him recite the Pledge of Allegiance in front of thousands of fans at Tom Lee Park. I agreed to the show, and I agreed that we would make Brandon say the Pledge. Brandon had a fit, but we had our show for July 4th. On the June 27th show, we ended with the final hype for the July 4th show. Brandon tried to burn the flag on live TV and Creighton came out and stopped him. I thought this really worked out great. It would not be the focal point of the show, nor did we have any plans for Creighton to wrestle Brandon. This really did an amazing job setting up this special themed 4th of July show.

A focal point of every episode became my feud with Lawler. I made it personal by taking personal shots at Stacy, even calling her a tramp, a slut and a gold digger. I blamed Stacy for causing issues between me and my lifelong hero and friend, Jerry Lawler. We got really personal. Finally, on the June 27 TV, Lawler became so frustrated and said maybe it was time to call it quits as a wrestler and concentrate on his duties of calling RAW on Monday nights. I took this as being Lawler's retirement speech, so I said that this was sad, it was Stacy's fault but Jerry Lawler's reign as the King has ended and that on next week's show, which was called Rumble On The River, that the Founder, Owner and President of Power Pro Wrestling would crown a new King. As we went off the air, Lawler called and told Dave Brown that if I named a new King, it would be the last thing I ever did. We ended the show by hyping the Rumble on River special the next week, featuring Brandon Baxter Pledging Allegiance to the Flag, that we would make a major match announcement for the July Coliseum show, we would have an Anything Goes Moondog Battle Royal, Brian Christopher facing Tom Prichard, as well as appearances by The Moondogs, Koko B. Ware, The Young Guns division, and the Crowning of the new King.

Lawler has always liked working with big guys. So, we booked the Giant Silva, who later became one of the Oddities in the WWE, to be the person who would work with Lawler at the Coliseum in July. This would be my major angle, an entire show long story to set up the match.

Before writing this chapter, I decided to watch Rumble on the River twenty years to the day since it aired. We did 154 shows in total and I just don't have the space to do detailed recaps on every show. However, this show was so important I am going to cover it in detail.

It is hard for me to remember what I did yesterday, but I remember so much about July 4, 1998. I remember it was miserably hot. The show was not scheduled to air until 7PM but I had to pick up something at the

television station around 11. I wanted to get to Tom Lee Park as early as possible. I was certainly experienced doing live television, but this would be my first time to work out of a production truck. I had no clue how big a crowd we would have for the show. It was so hot, and I was worried about how early the crowd would show up because I knew that for the folks at the park, the Power Pro television show was like an opening match. It was very important because it set the tone for the main event, which for the night would be after we went off the air when the big fireworks display was presented. I was glad our regular director would be our director for this event. I knew that because the prime-time show would have an entirely different look and feel that we could do a lot of things production-wise that we could never do in the studio. I remember doing rough draft after rough draft of this show, but I thought we were missing something. I knew that because of the time change that we would have a lot of eyes on the product. This was show #6 and we had done a good job so far, but the pressure was on, more than any other television show I had ever produced, to make sure this was a home run. I worked on nothing else all week. I got input from Lawler, Dave, Brandon and Dundee. By Thursday, I was happy with what was on paper. The key was to make it happen.

Our ring crew, Buddy Wayne, and the entire crew of the television station worked hard to make sure everything looked great. I had the production meeting with everybody but Lawler and Stacy, who were going to make a grand entrance. Lawler and I talked off and on throughout the day. We were going to use cell phones to coordinate his entrance. Lawler was not going to get to the park until time for him to go to the ring. He was not even going to come to the dressing room. He had a small TV that he had in the car with him that helped him keep up with what was going on in the show.

We started with a breathtaking shot of the big crowd already there for the show which featured a wide shot of the ring as well as a pyro display. I wanted this to look as big as we could make it. Dave and Corey started telling the story right from the start of the Crowning of the King and that Lawler said if I went through with this it could be the last thing I ever did.

I got lucky with the first match. I knew I wanted Brian Christopher to start off the show with a great opponent. The WWE had sent Tom Prichard down as the Giant’s handler. Tom had wrestled for years in Memphis and had success all over the world. He was a great worker and knew how to get

heat and he would thrive in this situation. I scheduled the match to go about 12 minutes and it went two segments. We aired a quick pre-recorded interview with Brian as soon as the match started, and it was then where we announced Brian would challenge The Rock for the WWE IC Title at Malice in the Palace. Dave and Corey would hype this throughout the program and plug that tickets would go on sale that coming Monday. Like expected, Brian and Tom had a great match, without a doubt the perfect opening match for the show. Brian's first ever tag partner Tony Williams, now known as Kid Wikkid, came out and tried to cause Brian to lose but it backfired, and Brian got a big win.

As soon as that match was over, we showed Brandon Baxter in a golf cart trying to escape Tom Lee Park. This was the tease for the Pledge of Allegiance coming up later in the show. However, his escape plan was foiled as Creighton Armour got officers from the Memphis Police Department to detain him. We hyped Brandon doing the Pledge would be happen later in the show.

Two segments up and two down. I was scheduled in two segments of the show, but I was also in the production truck the rest of the time producing the show. The truck was a long way away from the wrestling area, so they had a golf cart for me to get to and from the ring. It was cool, but nothing about this day was easy. Our second segment was The Crowning of The King. I went to the ring for an interview with Dave Brown. I was thrilled with the reaction of the fans in attendance as they were obviously familiar with our story and they greeted me with jeers and insults. I introduced my new King, the near seven-foot-tall Giant Silva from the WWE who I called the Giant King. This dude was still in training with Tom Prichard and WWE, but he sure looked impressive. What we were trying to do here was set up the next Coliseum show main event with Lawler and the Giant King. The Giant King looked impressive in his interview as he just stood there looking mean and scary. He certainly did that well. I proclaimed him the new King and presented him with a crown. After the interview, the Giant had a handicap match with three wrestlers. They were Beau James, Bobby Bronze, and Swole. Giant King destroyed all 3 of them at once and really put him over strong as a monster. During the match, Dave Brown got a phone call from Lawler and Dave explained Lawler was mad and he was headed to Tom Lee Park to follow up on his warning to me that if I did this, it would be the last thing I ever did, but

there was much more to the show before we got to that. Dave and Corey continued to hype that Lawler was on the way to the park the rest of the show.

We then went with a Street Fight with Billy Travis against Bill Dundee. It was important that we had wrestlers on this show that most people at the park would know, even if they hadn't watched wrestling in a while, and Bill was certainly known by everybody. They had a hell of a match that ended up with interference and with Moondog Spot coming out to help Bill. This set up the Moondog Battle Royal for later. It was another good segment with a great reaction.

At this point, we went with the Brandon Baxter Pledge of Allegiance segment. Brandon had tried to leave the area after the Travis-Dundee match, but Creighton Armour came out with the flag. Corey got in the ring with Brandon and told him if he did not recite the pledge he would be fired and never allowed on TV-5 again. Brandon did his interview, said the Pledge so quick you could not understand him and then tried to leave the area. Brandon went to leave but Spellbinder came out to stop him. Creighton and Spellbinder were able to catch Brandon. Remember, this was the 4th of July and Brandon had been doing anti-American interviews. This was our patriotic segment for the show. Brandon was covered in red, white and blue paint as we went to the next commercial break. The camera shot of Brandon covered in paint was classic.

Memphis wrestling is known for crazy, wild matches and brawls so the Rumble on the River had to have a wild and crazy match. We went with a Moondog Battle Royal and this match delivered. I thought that the viewers would think this match would be won by the Moondog, Bill Dundee or Brian Christopher. So, I wanted to go with someone who was full time on the roster who they would not necessarily expect to get the victory. As expected, the match was wild and crazy as they all fought with weapons out in the crowd. However, it came down to Bulldog Raines, Brian Christopher and Spellbinder. Brian and Spell were real life friends and traveling partners who teamed together many times in Power Pro. So, Brian eliminated Bulldog, had his back to Spellbinder and Bulldog from outside hit Brian with a chair and Spellbinder then threw Brian over the top rope to become the winner of the Moondog Battle Royal. I did this for a couple of reasons. I wanted the winner to be a surprise, but the main reason was I wanted to build a story of Brian against Spellbinder going forward.

We then went to break with a camera shot from Chopper 5, the news helicopter that showed Lawler and Stacy entering Tom Lee Park. These were the sort of productions values we could never get at the studio. It looked very impressive and made the unique look of the show feel even more special.

After commercial, I was in the ring with the big Giant King. I also had Tony Falk and Bulldog Raines with me, and I instructed them to keep Lawler from getting in the ring. The camera followed Lawler and Stacy walking from the car through the parking lot to the ring. The reaction of the people for Lawler showing up was fantastic. I directed Tony and Bulldog to go out of the ring and to prevent Lawler from getting to me. Lawler made short work of them and rolled into me and punched me, to a great reaction. The Giant then attacked Lawler and had the advantage as I was directing traffic. Stacy then decided to help Lawler. I ended up throwing Stacy to the floor a couple of different times. I started helping the Giant attack Lawler. Lawler then started a comeback on the Giant and Stacy made a comeback on me. Stacy had never been in this role before and did great. The people went nuts when Stacy was throwing me around. Finally, the Giant left the ring and then Lawler hit me, and I was knocked out of the ring. The show ended with Lawler doing a great interview, his hands held high, and the people cheering like crazy. I was able to sneak in the ring and get the crown. The show then ended.

Afterwards, everybody was so excited. It was a home run of a show. We got eyes on the product that we never had, and I was thrilled to death with the quality of the show. I was excited about the direction of Power Pro Wrestling. But, as excited and happy as I was, there was more work to do. Power Pro Wrestling had a Mid-South Coliseum show coming up in just a couple of weeks and we had no time to spare as July 21st approached.

CHAPTER 7:

The Founder, Owner and President

I am going to cover the next Coliseum card in this chapter, but also go more into my on-air role as The Founder, Owner and President of Power Pro Wrestling. I have already discussed that my on-air role was not planned. I had envisioned myself being the good guy promoter figure but that changed in the spur of the moment after Austin Idol failed to return to Power Pro. I know what the talk was within the Power Pro locker room, from within the business, and from the wrestling press. The complaint was I was using the show to make myself a television star. I was copying Vince and Eric from WWE and WCW, who were both portraying heel authority figures in their respective companies. I was the evil promoter in Memphis. I will try to explain both now. First, Memphis wrestling had always featured a strong heel manager in a main role. In the past we had Dr. Ken Ramey, Sir Steve Clements, Sam Bass, Jim Cornette, Downtown Bruno, Scott Bowden, Brandon Baxter and many more. Without a doubt, the most successful manager ever in Memphis was Jimmy Hart. But, when Hart first started, he was in the role of a stooge to Lawler. He was not heavily featured. What got Jimmy over and what is remembered to this day is his feud with Jerry Lawler. The fans knew they were close friends as that was common knowledge. Lawler broke his leg in 1980 and was out of action for most of the year. Hart became over and started being the featured manager and talent when he turned on Lawler. He did the famous interview where he asked what you did with a racehorse that broke its leg, saying that you shoot it when it was no longer useful. When Lawler was out of action, Hart betrayed him. It was believable and real. They got five years out of that feud. I loved heel managers and I thought the right heel manager would make big money for the company. I had remarkable success in 1995 and 1996 in the USWA with Brandon Baxter in the heel manager role. I thought Brandon was the best manager since Jimmy Hart. I still thought that when we opened Power Pro and planned to make him our top manager there as well. I never considered myself for that role. But, when the fans reacted to me in a negative way on the second show, I went in a different direction. Memphis is also known for making money using history and making it

personal. By their reactions, the fans showed me that I needed to be that person. It was not planned. It was organic and we went with it. That is the stuff you really can't plan for. Even though it was not my plan, I was having fun doing it and we were having success with it, so I decided to just go with it. My current role was a role I had earmarked for Brandon. While I thought Brandon was great and I thought he was a huge asset, at the time I felt he needed to be in another role, so I went with the major focus of the promotion on the story between me and Lawler. I felt bad that I brought Brandon in for this role and we had to make him second fiddle to me. He was a better talker than me and he was certainly a better worker than me, but the story was better with me due to my established role as owner of the company and the natural reaction from the fans. We eventually came up with a new role for Brandon that worked out great for him and even ended up putting him in a situation down the line to have a future after wrestling. I will admit, it looks like I was copying the WWE or WCW and trying to be Vince or Eric, but I made the final call to be in that role, and the people put me there. I think society during this time had become anti-establishment. Stone Cold Steve Austin had become the anti-establishment hero and had become the most successful wrestling star in history. Since I was the boss, the fans did not want to like me. Lawler and I had great history and like the Hart feud with Lawler, this made sense. Ratings were great, and this just worked. In wrestling, if something is working, you must go with it. I will admit that eventually I got stale in that role and the people got tired of it. I did end up taking up too much of the television time when I should have been giving the time to someone else. Wrestling is very well known for going to the well with something successful once too often and I was guilty of this with my role. But, at this point in the story, there was plenty of other stuff we could still do. I feel that what we had done so far was just the start of the story and there was a lot more content we could provide. The best of the Randy/Lawler story was yet to come.

First things first, we will get back to the story. We needed to follow up on the Rumble on the River and move forward in the hype for the next Mid-South Coliseum show that was being called Malice in the Palace and would be main evented by Lawler, with Stacy, against the Giant King, with me in his corner. Lawler and I were heavily involved in the television leading up to the Malice in the Palace. During the next couple of weeks my crew of wrestlers and bodyguards beat up Lawler and Stacy on TV. We had Lawler

chase me out to the parking lot of the TV station and ended up busting my car window. We showed video of The Giant King attacking Lawler at a Monday Night RAW taping. On one show, Lawler arrived in the studio in a wheelchair and attacked me, then chased me down Union Avenue in my boxers! We had three weeks to build for this show. I don't think we could have done a better job building toward the main event as everything was firing on all cylinders.

I was happy with the Malice in the Palace card at the Mid-South Coliseum, set for July 21, 1998. I didn't feel it would be better than the first Coliseum show, but I had a good feeling as we headed into the show.

For the Malice in the Palace card, our lineup was:

King Cobra vs The Yellow Jacket (Kevin Lawler)

Young Guns Championship Match: Kid Wikkid vs Derrick King

One Night Tag Tournament

Featuring the Rock N Roll Express, Master B & Tony Falk, Tracy Smothers & Tom Prichard, Billy Joe Travis & Bulldog Raines and Moondog Rover & Beau James (Tournament won by Billy Travis and Bulldog Raines)

The Spellbinder vs Henrich Von Keller

Dog Collar Match: Koko B. Ware vs Superstar Bill Dundee

WWE IC Title: Brian Christopher vs The Rock

The Rock was just getting hot on WWE TV. If we would've had this same card a year or so later with the same build, we would've had close to a sellout.

Main Event: The King Jerry Lawler (w/Stacy) vs The Giant King (w/Randy Hales)

The Giant King was counted out of the ring, so Lawler was the winner. We sent the fans home happy after Lawler gave me three or four pile drivers.

The Malice in the Palace drew about 3500 people. It was not the financial success that our first show had been, but it did very well. This was the last time we would be able to get main event talent from the WWE. They were so hot all over the country that they were no longer able to send us their top drawing cards. I did not feel we would do well at the Coliseum without that top talent. I thought we had a great crew to produce weekly television. However, so much had changed not only in the wrestling world but in society as general. The Malice, even though it made a profit, was the

last Coliseum event we promoted, except for one paid show during the fair in October of 1998.

The focus now was to make our television show as good as possible and promote live events around Memphis. Certainly, producing as good of a television show as possible was the number one goal of Power Pro Wrestling. Our next story was set to feature the Battle of Control of Power Pro Wrestling between me and Lawler. This story also involved Stacy, Brandon Baxter, Brian Christopher, Billy Travis, and my bodyguards. The focus of the story went from just me and Lawler to also involve Brandon and Stacy, making them a bigger part of the story. Billy's role in the story was to be the person to have great matches with Lawler. During the next several weeks we did a lot of wild and crazy things including the first TV after the Coliseum show when Lawler was in the control room running the show because I had been hurt by the piledrivers. At one show, I arrived in a wheelchair and was attacked by Lawler. Another time, I led a sneak attack of Lawler in the control room. One week we had Lawler taken away from the TV station in an ambulance. We even had a week where I tried to have Stacy kidnapped. Lawler and Stacy faced me and Billy two weeks in a row in the television main events, with the second being a Hair vs Hair match with me getting shaved bald on live TV. At one point I went on TV and alleged that Stacy was having an affair. After that, we featured a Billy Travis vs Lawler television main event where Lawler got a match with me if he won. He won, which resulted in me getting another good beating. We also had another television match between Lawler and Travis where I was forced to not only to be in a small cage for the match but for the entire show!

We had kept the Lawler/Randy story going from pretty much the second show through show #21. Up next would be a feud for a few weeks between Brian Christopher and Jerry Lawler. I also started story involving me, Stacy and Brandon Baxter. A couple of years earlier, Brandon and I did a feud while he was the heel and I was the baby face promoter. This time around, I would be the heel. We did a segment where I challenged Stacy to a TV match, but Brandon came out and told her to leave the studio because I was crazy and instead, he would fight me. Brandon and I had started not getting along in the story for a few weeks. Billy and I gave Brandon a brutal beating, dragged him outside and tossed him in the dumpster.

We would soon go a different direction with Lawler and Stacy but for the next several months, our B story was the feud between me and Brandon. I am very proud of our feud, from which we still do stuff around Jonesboro from time to time because people still remember it. We were going to really gear up our story.

I always felt it was critical that we bring in the best talent that we could. We had to keep things fresh. We had to have as many big-name superstars as possible. On the September 19, 1998 show, we were able to have the debut of Sid Vicious. Sid and I had talked before we even did our first show but had different views on what the promotion should be. I was hardheaded at time. Not only did I feel I needed to listen to Lawler, Dundee and the TV station, I knew that Sid would be an impact player and I always wanted him to be a part of it. My first responsibility was to make sure the show, airing at a Saturday 11AM direction was the vision that the television station insisted. I felt Sid and I were not in agreement on the direction. However, by this point, the live event promoter Buddy Wayne was friends with Sid, and they talked, and Buddy presented me with an idea to debut Sid. It was a surprise and it got over huge and it is one of my favorite things we had ever done. As a character and in the story, I was against bringing Sid into Power Pro Wrestling and that is how we did bring him in. Buddy brought it up on a TV interview and I made it clear on television that Sid would not ever be a part of Power Pro Wrestling. Later in the show, we had a commotion outside in the parking lot which was a bunch of guys showing up on motorcycles, including big Sid. The people went crazy and it was a great debut. Sid only appeared on a few shows, but his presence was strongly felt. Sid would end up going to WCW the following year before suffering a major leg injury live on pay per view.

Sid’s return was not the only big debut of WWE and national known talent on the Power Hour. The first couple of weeks of October saw some great debuts, great television and great live events. For the October 3rd Coliseum show, we had WWE talent come in for both television as well as the Coliseum show. As producer, I was keeping up with the production values of both WWE and WCW. I knew I did not have the deep roster, budget or the big arenas to compete with them. However, I did think we could compete with both groups as far as producing great action and telling compelling stories. I wanted to follow the framework of what had worked in the past with people that were local stars, but I also knew I needed to

develop a young crew who did not exactly do things like the wrestlers once did. That is not bad, but every generation evolves. So, our legends had been there but now the shoe was on the other foot. The October 3rd TV was to hype the Coliseum show and spotlight Sid. October was a transition/maintenance episode to get ready for some upcoming huge talent changes and a big change of overall direction. The national shows were really stepping up their game, so I felt I need to do that, with both with production and talent.

We started the Power Hour October 3 with a parking lot shot of a limo arriving. I got out of the limo, followed by Dr. Tom Prichard, The Giant Silva (Giant King), legendary Road Warrior Hawk and Bart Gunn. All these guys were sent in by the WWE. Most of the hype for the television was for the Coliseum show that night. This was a great show, loaded with talent and featured a Ten Man Tag Match, Sid Vicious appearing throughout the show, Spellbinder wrestling Tom Prichard and Jerry Lawler facing Giant Silva. We ended that show with a brawl involving Sid, Lawler, Hawk and Bart Gunn at the end. It was a very hot episode as we amped up my vision for the show, "Expect the Unexpected."

We had our third and final Mid-South Coliseum show. This was a paid show and was on Saturday, October 3, 1998 and was a part of the Mid-South Fair. Traditionally, the fair was a tough time to draw a crowd in Memphis because the fair drained money out of the city. But this was a paid show, which meant Power Pro was paid to present the show, but the fans still had to pay extra to get into the wrestling. I feel if the fans could have come into the Coliseum with a paid fair ticket that this show would have been great and might have sold out. That was not the case and the show drew just 1,000. The card was designed to feature Sid and that is what it did.

SETTLE THE SCORE

Saturday, October 3, Mid-South Coliseum

Lance Jade defeated Tony Falk

Samantha defeated Vicious Vicki

Bill Dundee defeated Ashley Hudson

Kid Wikkid defeated Derrick King in a ladder match

Brandon Baxter defeated Randy Hales with help from Stacy

Gauntlet Match: Sid defeated The Bodyguard, Bulldog Raines, Rex King and Tom Prichard

Giant Silva defeated The Spellbinder
Sid won a Battle Royal
Jerry Lawler and Sid battled Road Warrior Hawk and Bart Gunn to a No Contest

Next week, we followed up by having another great show. The purpose of this show was to follow up on the last show as well as to recap the Settle the Score Coliseum show. We also had a big fundraiser that night in Covington, TN. On this show, we once again featured Sid, had two big tag team matches and our main event was Road Warrior Hawk facing Jerry Lawler. I mentioned this before, but we also did a real heavy interview where I insulted Brandon's family, beat him up and put him in the dumpster. That night in Covington, the crew from TV-5 was there to video the action and we had a packed crowd at the Middle School.

I can't end this section without talking about the October 31, 1998 show. This was a Halloween Day show with a Halloween theme. This is not one of my favorite shows, but it served its purpose by presenting the Halloween atmosphere. I was able to get Lawler's help in rounding up all kinds of Halloween costumes. We had everybody wearing costumes, including the announcers. Yes, this was as silly as it sounds. All the older guys were probably rolling over in their graves and some of the old school guys on the roster almost had an early death. The show was main evented by a Masquerade Maul Elimination match where we had wrestlers in costumes of Batman (Lawler), Wolfman, Popeye (Brian Christopher), Bulldog, Dr. Frank, Killer Clown, President Clinton, Gene Simmons, Gravedigger and more. To be honest, I really could not force myself to watch this show back for this project but if you can, try to see it for yourself. Actually, it was a fun show, but I had been raised up being taught that funny means no money. I am sure I would like this show a lot more now than I did at the time and it was a favorite of Lawler…imagine that. We had spent the weeks before hurting Brandon then having Brandon return and start playing mind games with me. He lured me outside into the parking lot and was hiding on the roof of the television show. He ended up throwing a bucket of water on me. Then, he lured me out again and ended up putting feathers and syrup all over me. This week, I just knew that he would be in a costume, so I ended up trying to attack the person who I thought was Brandon. Instead, in the costume was my main man, my head referee, Downtown Bruno who I attacked. I ended up getting jumped and

embarrassed by Brandon again. Brandon was finally getting the best of The Owner, The Founder and The President. That would soon change.

I was having a blast. The television ratings were great. The live events we did run were doing well. From a standpoint of being a performer, I was being challenged and I enjoyed the evil promoter role I was doing on TV. We had completed 25 shows. It was time for new talent and time for a new direction. It was also time to officially start the developmental relationship with the WWE.

CHAPTER 8:

WWE Developmental: Part One

Working with the WWE was not exactly a new idea for Memphis wrestling. It all started around 1993 when Jerry Jarrett started having conversations with Vince McMahon on a regular basis. Jerry started consulting with Vince. Lawler ended up starting to take bookings with the WWE as a wrestler. In return, the WWE started sending talent to Memphis. During that period, we saw such big stars as Bret Hart, Owen Hart, Randy Savage, Shawn Michaels, Mr. Perfect, Lex Luger, Yokozuna, Tatanka, Sensational Sherri, Papa Shango, Giant Gonzalez, The Undertaker and so many more. This was a case of Vince sending top talent into Memphis to either try out new gimmicks or for a favor in return for both Lawler and Jeff Jarrett becoming regulars in the WWE. The 1993 talent exchange between USWA and WWE is probably best known for the first-time fans were able to see Vince McMahon portray a heel character on television. McMahon mocked Memphis wrestling and the fans in some classic promos. Of course, this character would go on to become one half of one of the most successful feuds in wrestling history when Vince became “Mr. McMahon” on WWE TV in 1998 and went to war with “Stone Cold” Steve Austin.

We had another working relationship with Vince and the WWE in 1996 while I was back booking the entire Memphis territory. This laid the foundation to getting an official developmental deal with Power Pro. The idea was to send young, inexperienced talent to us so the young talent could get both live event and live television exposure. The WWE did not pay for this service at the time and if I remember correctly, we had to pay the talent out of our live event gates. The deal got better with Power Pro, but at the time we got good looking, athletic talent who would probably go on to become big stars worldwide. You might’ve heard of the first guy they sent to us here in Memphis. In 1996, Jim Ross called and told us that they were going to send a guy down here and he had the perfect name: Flex Kavana. You ever heard of him? Probably not. But, Flex Kavana was really Dwayne Johnson. I had met Dewey (as he was known when he was younger) several times. I was excited that Rocky Johnson’s son would be coming to Memphis Wrestling. I knew he was athletic as he had just finished his

college football career. I knew he had movie star looks but how could you possibly know that he would one day become the most popular and successful movie star in the country? I also knew he was inexperienced (green to the business) and was at the start of his career. His first booking was on a Friday night in Kennett, MO. I normally prepared for television on Friday nights, so I was not at the event. But he was booked for TV the next day. I had never watched any footage of Dwayne. I am not sure that he had one actual match under his belt. I do have a classic story about his appearance in Kennett. Around midnight, after the show was over, I got a phone call from Jamie Dundee and Warren Wolfe (Wolfie D), who made up our main event tag team called PG-13. Both were young and had several years of experience and were in a top spot. After the show that night, they called me. The first question out of their mouths was asking if I had Dwayne booked on TV the next morning. I told them I did and that I had agreed to bring him in to give him both live event and television experience. They both told me he was green, horrible, would kill our business, and that he had no future in the business. I told them that I had promised WWE that he would get main event and television experience. I could not and would not take him off TV. I also knew he would be working with more experienced talent on TV and that I would be there to talk to him. Not only that, but Lawler would also be at TV and I had already planned on having Lawler help him with both his match and his interview. Especially after having that phone call the night before, I was very pleased with his debut on TV. I thought he had the “it” factor, but I would be lying if I said I thought he was just about two or three years away from being one of the biggest stars in the history of our business. His time in Memphis was short but he was great to be around, and he improved every week in the ring and in his interviews. I loved everything about Dwayne Johnson…except his ring name. The name “Flex Kavana” got over with our fans about like a fart would go over in church. By the time Power Pro went on the air, Dwayne Johnson, as Rocky Maivia was already becoming a huge star in WWE but we enjoyed his stay in the USWA.

With the success of the Rock on the WWE Main roster, they felt that sending talent to Memphis would be a huge benefit. Even though our company name and owner had changed, it was still Memphis wrestling and we still had live events and live television, which was unique to Memphis. We were the only live weekly wrestling show on the smaller scale and

allowing the younger talents to get practice and exposure under the pressures of live TV was incredibly valuable to helping them develop. Wrestling had changed. In the past, wrestlers had about 40 different territories they could go to and get experience by working every night. That had changed. Most of the territories had gone away. Even though it was a natural idea, I give Jim Cornette credit for making it happen. He joined the WWE full time and was heavily involved in talent development and he approached me about making Memphis a developmental company. It was a win-win situation for both companies. They would have a place to send their talent to get both live event and live television experience on a regular basis. We would not only get a crew of athletic men, with a great look to freshen up our crew, but we would also get potential superstars at the start of their career. I knew it would pay off and it still pays off for me today. A big reason most of you are reading this book is to read about how some of their favorites became stars. A bonus to this is that not only did we *not* have to pay the WWE talent, but *we* were being paid about $1,000 a week to feature them on our show. We had gone through 29 shows without an official WWE deal but the past cooperation of WWE by sending in top talent helped give his credibility. This would be the second phase of the plan. It was decided that the first set of developmental talent would debut on Saturday, November 7 and it was up to them to make an impression and it was up to me and those helping me write television to push them to the moon. I had not met any of them or watched any tapes at all. I did receive pictures of everybody and talked to Cornette to get as much background as I could on the talent. As the relationship went on, Cornette left the corporate office to move back to Louisville to start his own developmental company, Ohio Valley Wrestling. At this point, Jim Ross was the VP of Talent Relations, but they had Bruce Prichard assigned as the contact person for developmental. Kevin Kelly became involved much later, but how we got to that is another story.

An interesting note on the November 7th show was that NBC interrupted the show due to the Space Shuttle coverage with the return of John Glenn. We started early and ended early, but we had a hell of a show and each of the WWE talent made a big impact.

We started the show with highlights from the last week and then I challenged Brandon Baxter to a singles match for later in the show. Up next was the first debut. I had pushed our Young Guns division since the start of

Power Pro, and I had focused the division on Kid Wikkid (Tony Williams) for the past 29 shows. On this show, Tony was scheduled to defend his Young Guns Trophy against Erin O'Grady. Erin was the first of the developmental talent to debut and he did so with no hype and no fanfare. I wanted the fans to think that Tony would dominate the match and retain the trophy. The viewers were expecting a squash match. Erin was a smaller wrestler, with an Irish gimmick, who was a great worker. I had been told that by Cornette. I was blown away by the match. It was fantastic and in the era of star ratings, it would've received a great one. The packed studio reacted great when Erin won the match. After his stint in PPW, Erin became Crash Holly in the WWE and had a memorable run. To give you more information, his real name was Michael John Lockwood and he was born in August of 1971. He became a pro wrestler in 1989, so he had nine years of experience in the independents. Once making his debut with the WWE, he held the Hardcore Championship on 22 occasions. He was released from the WWE in 2003 and then went to Total Nonstop Action (TNA) later that year. On a sad note, he was found dead on November 6, 2003. He had recently received divorce papers from his wife and according to Wikipedia, his death was officially ruled a suicide. He was buried in China Grove, NC, the long-time retirement home of the Fabulous Jackie Fargo. Nora Greenwald, who performed with Crash as Molly Holly, released an autobiographical DVD and a portion of the profits from the sale of the DVD went to Crash's daughter's education fund. RIP to Crash Holly, who I knew as Erin O'Grady. I will never forget him, and I am thankful for all he brought to Power Pro. I will talk more about him as we go along.

Back to wrestling and the first developmental crew. I had three more people to debut on that same show. I also had scheduled a Boomerang on a Pole Match between Ashley Hudson and Bill Dundee. Ashley was brought in as Bill's protégée and he had turned on Bill on an earlier show, so we had been giving this story a lot of time. Lawler and Stacy were out of town that week, so they were not on the show. I normally hated it when Lawler was not there, but especially on shows where they were designed to get heat, it was good for Lawler to get a break. I wanted O'Grady as a babyface, but I wanted the other three guys to be heels. I felt I had the most heat of any of the heels and these new guys would get the rub off my heat and being involved with an established story that the people cared about. That is the reason I challenged Brandon. Normally I did not book myself to wrestle on

TV. First, I was not a wrestler. I never claimed to be. However, I was in the role of a heel manager and there were times where, in the story, I needed to be involved physically and there were times when I needed to get my ass kicked by the guys I was feuding with. I was not a wrestler in the ring, but I took a great ass kicking and I could throw a hell of a punch. The guy's said I was stiff as hell, but I was no worker, so it had to look good. I did not make a habit of this, but I thought Brandon and I had good chemistry together. He was not a wrestler either, but he was just so naturally good. If he would have been bigger when he was younger, he could have been a star in the ring. The key to me and Brandon was people believed we hated each other, and they believed in the stuff we did. That was the bottom line. People believed. The television then was all about me and Brandon. The purpose was to further our story by adding new people into the mix. We had a basic five- or six-minute brawl where Brandon got the win. After that it was complete chaos. I had Vicious Vic Grimes made his debut. Vic was a huge guy from California who was known for being a hardcore wrestler. He had a very mean look. If Vic was able to have a wild brawl, he was good. If it was a technical wrestling match, he was not near as good. But, for this debut, Vic was great. Remember that for the last few weeks, Brandon was getting the best of me. It was time for my revenge. Vic attacked Brandon and we threw him through a table. This really looked vicious on TV as Vic lived up to his moniker. We then threw him outside the ring and dragged him to the hallway. I wanted this to be very believable and major. I had Dave Brown, uncharacteristically, verbally come to Brandon's aid and he demanded we stopped the beating, or he would make sure we would never be on TV-5 again. We went for high drama for this as we had an ambulance come and take Brandon away. We told this story throughout the rest of the show.

As Brandon was waiting for the ambulance, I went out on the set and introduced my new crew. First out was Vicious Vic Grimes. He did an interview that made no sense, but I wanted him to be thought of as being out of control and nuts, which worked as he did that great. It did not matter that the interview was not great. I then brought out a huge man I called Baldo. I believe he was my favorite of any of the developmental guys we had. That is a big statement considering we later had Kurt Angle, the Olympic Gold Medal winner who is now a WWE Hall of Famer. Baldo was great, and he made an instant impact. Baldo was a 6 foot, 7 inches tall, 350-

pound monster whose real name is Matt Bloom. Matt was a football player for the University of Pittsburgh and briefly played for the NFL San Diego Chargers. He was a lifelong wrestling fan who was trained by the legendary Killer Kowalski. He started his career in late 1997. He had an amazingly scary look and did a very good interview. Right away, for the story, I named him as my new bodyguard. It was then time to introduce the last of the guys I was bringing out on that show, the Blue Chipper as we called him, Shawn Stasiak, son of former WWWF Champion Stan Stasiak. Shawn was 6 foot, five inches tall; 240 lbs. and this guy looked like a million bucks. I thought Shawn was going to be a huge star for years to come. Even though I thought Matt Bloom was the best talent we ever had from developmental, I also thought that Shawn was involved in the best *story* we ever did. I will get to that story in the next chapter. He made his Pro Wrestling debut in 1996 and retired in 2002. He did have a run in the WWE and later appeared for WCW. He retired from the business in 2002 to become a chiropractor. He also works as a traveling motivational speaker.

Even though it was almost twenty years ago, I still remember November 7, 1998 like it was yesterday. I had been thrilled to death with the product that we had established over 29 weeks. However, I was also fearful of becoming stale. I was also very much aware of the product WWE and WCW were producing every week. The business was changing, and the fans were changing with it. Fans started wanting more entertainment and soap opera in their wrestling. Fans that understood what wrestling was wanted more behind the scenes stuff. Casual viewers wanted a more soap opera product and a big part of the audience wanted more sex appeal. The guys wanted pretty girls and the girls wanted good looking guys. There were exceptions, but that was the majority. The newer fans wanted to see a product like they were seeing on WWE or WCW each week. We still had long term fans that wanted to see the wrestling they always had watched, the way it had always been presented with the stars they had always watched. I wanted to serve both audiences. It was hard to please both audiences. It was hard for me to change. I was brought up in the era that a real looking product was the only way to be successful. I think the reason I decided to go with a balanced product is that I studied what was going on nationally and worldwide with wrestling. I talked to young people all the time and worldwide wrestling had never been at a more mainstream level. Jerry Lawler was right in the middle of the big-time success the WWE was

experiencing and, in our conversations, he encouraged me that we needed to change with the times. By this point, Power Pro was being paid by WWE and that check was a big part of our income. They wanted their talent developed in a way that would prepare them for the WWE environment and wrestling style they presented. I felt an obligation to do that. This was a major conflict for me. For one thing, I liked the wrestling better, and still do, the way it was. I felt that for Power Pro to grow, we had to have a balance. We still had to feature our legends, but we also had to develop the new talent. I felt the future of our WWE deal depended on it. It was a constant battle with the talent. Most of the legends were very critical of the new talent. They were not doing things like they had done them. The young talent always complained about the legends. Wrestling people have always complained. Even if all the shows sell out, there is someone unhappy. I had both legends and the newer talent complaining that I was on television too much and that there was too much focus on me and Brandon. I agree that at time, we did too much. I also knew that Dave Brown and the management of the TV station were happy with that story and the ratings supported that as well. There was no way I could afford to spend what the bigger companies could spend for talent and production, but I felt we could compete with them in the story department. I thought we could upgrade our talent roster and we did that with the WWE relationship and developmental deal. I did not want to totally stray from what made Memphis wrestling unique. Again, we had to produce a balanced show. We had two types of wrestling audiences and I needed to make sure we satisfied both sets. For the most part, especially in this period, we did.

Power Pro Wrestling was about to have the riskiest and most up to date story we ever did. By risky, I mean that what we were about to do was designed to be more adult oriented and over the top than what not only Power Pro, but Memphis wrestling in general had ever known. Memphis wrestling had always come close to the limit on violence but had never gone this far with adult themed material. The next major thing that we did is my favorite storyline we ever presented. Personally, I have great memories of the Brandon-Randy story because we got so much mileage out of it. But the love triangle story we started with Lawler, Stasiak and Stacy tested all boundaries and it turned out great.

CHAPTER 9:

The Lawler-Stacy-Shawn Stasiak Story

Wow! Before starting on this chapter, I took about an hour break to catch up with any news that had gone on today. It was a slow news day. Afterwards, I sat down at this computer and read the last paragraph of the last chapter. Revisiting the Lawler/Stacy/Stasiak story while in the writing process made me want to watch it all over again to be back in the mindset for this book, so I did. I made this chapter sound exciting by saying that it was the most adult themed story Memphis wrestling ever did and saying that the Lawler-Stacy and Shawn feud was the best. That is a lot of pressure for this chapter. So, here we go. It all started on the November 28 Power Hour and continued for fifteen weeks. We started this feud off very strong, then slowed it down for a bit, did some segments that were not as good but wrapped up the story in a crazy way. It was a known fact that Lawler and Stacy were an actual real-life couple. This was not a story that was completely made up. This is a story that happens all the time in real life, where you have a happy couple and then you have some jerk trying to steal the girl. In real life, unfortunately way too often, these kinds of situations have led to violence and even death. We did not want any real violence, abuse, and certainly didn't want anyone to get killed. At the same time, I knew from being in the room while my mother watched her soap operas, people were intrigued by this kind of story. So, Lawler and I both put on our soap opera writer caps and crafted this story. Stasiak was the perfect guy for this role. As I watched all 15 weeks of the TV, I really felt he came across as a cocky muscle head that was in love with himself. Shawn's character was as unlikeable as he possibly could be. He was the type of person everybody despised, both the men and the women. He also thought of himself as a man with a great body that had all the right moves and he thought every woman would throw herself at him. He was playing a role that was unlikable to everyone, and he played it well. On the November 28 TV, Shawn appeared several times during the show posing and showing off. Lawler and Stacy came out for their interview to talk about the recent Jim Carey movie "Man on The Moon." Shawn came out and made a pass at Stacy. She turned him down. This came across as real. Watching it back, I

got mad at Stasiak even though Lawler and I were the ones telling him what to do! After we came back from a break a camera in the back picked up a shot of Lawler being helped by a few people. He had been attacked from behind and Stacy was missing. It was assumed that Stasiak had kidnapped her, which is classic soap opera stuff. Stasiak had a match later in the program. A camera had followed Lawler all over the studio looking for Stacy but with no luck. He rolled into the ring and made a big comeback and the fans went crazy. The fans still reacted big for a Lawler comeback, every time. Stasiak ran away and Lawler was forced by security to leave the wrestling area. Stasiak ended up winning the match then went over to the announce table and asked the camera to follow him. They went upstairs to a storage prep area. There is no way in hell we could get away with doing something like this today on Saturday morning television, but the world was a different place back in the late 90s. In was revealed that Stacy was tied to her chair wearing only her bra and panties. I knew we were pushing the envelope here but also knew that this was what fans wanted to see, as it combined sex appeal with traditional Good vs Evil wrestling story telling. We ended that show with Jerry Lawler doing one of his classic fired up interviews after he had finally found Stacy and got into a big brawl with Stasiak upstairs in the storage area.

This was a transition period for Power Pro Wrestling. We were trying to keep up with the times. We were still on a very limited budget, but due to the WWE deal, we had a bigger budget than we ever had since forming the company. We still had to try to get to a different level. Our production needed to be upgraded. Our talent needed to be upgraded. Even though we did not need to copy what the WWE or WCW were doing, I felt that we needed to get away from strictly being a traditional Memphis wrestling company. Going for more of an adult audience and having more adult oriented stories was the direction I felt should go in. I will admit that not every story we did worked out as planned. But, not every traditional “rasslin” story had worked, either. I was happy with where we were at as a television product. Production values had increased tremendously. The booking and the story telling had changed as well. We were a television product first, not a live event product. This made an enormous difference in how the shows were written. The focus of the show was no longer to hype our live event business. The focus was to concentrate on television that left fans thirsty for more and building ratings week to week. Our goal was to

leave the fans excited to see the next episode. Live events were still a part of what we did, but the televising ratings were our main focus. This allowed me to have more competitive, main event type matches. We also featured more stipulation matches when the story called for them, and we had stories play out from beginning, middle, and end as fans tuned in each week to find out what happened next.

I did not talk like this way back then, but I do now. In wrestling terminology, we were building wrestling angles and programs. In TV speak, we were creating storyline arcs. The story we were doing with Lawler, Stacy and Stasiak was a notable example of that.

In this book, I'm recapping the major plot points of this and other major Power Pro storylines, but there is so much more to seeing the angles yourself. I would suggest that if you're interested in seeing this or any of the angles mentioned in the book to check out the Power Pro library on DVD. My website has a complete episode guide with match listings of all PPW TV shows. For info on purchasing PPW DVDs you can email me at randybentonhales@gmail.com

We did so much with this triangle. We had Stacy accidently cause Lawler to lose several matches. We did a Christmas show where we sent the cameras to do a tour of Lawler's Christmas decorations. During the tour, we had Brian Christopher and Stasiak show up and crash the party. Lawler ended up throwing fire at Stasiak. Another week, we also had Stasiak showing up at the house when Lawler was at the studio and Stacy was home by herself. We ended up having the police show up as Stacy's puppy chased Shawn all over the yard and he ended up jumping over the big fence. By this point, Brian had been switched heel (villain) and was teaming with Stasiak. I thought Brian made a better heel. I now second guess my decision. Even though we were trying to fool ourselves in believing people did not know Brian was Lawler's son, they did. I still believed that we needed to have viewers suspend believability and buy the stories we were doing. We could stretch the truth but at the same time we had to be careful not to insult the audience. I think we did this with Brian and Lawler. If I had it to do over again, I would never put Brian in this situation. With that being said, I thought Brian did a great job with the story he was asked to take part in.

Before I get into the next part of the story, I want to make the creative direction for this story clear. I was still the producer and head writer of the

show. But, as he had been with his career for years, Jerry Lawler had a lot of input and control on this story. I said this story was one of the best stories we ever did on Power Pro Wrestling. This was not something created only by Randy Hales or only by Jerry Lawler. We discussed the story weekly and equally had ideas and input into the direction of the story. I respected Jerry Lawler and I was not going to ask him to do anything he did not want to do. He also respected my creativity and had faith in my storyline ideas. I always put a lot of thought and a lot of time into thinking about the creative. Jerry was the type who was at his best when he was acting on the spur of the moment. The combination of the two of us worked out great. I normally plotted the direction, discussed the plan with Jerry and he would add in ideas as he thought of them. One of my favorite angles we did during this time period was when we did another video shoot at Lawler's house. I think that I came up with the idea, but, remember, it has been twenty years since this was created. I produced the set-up stuff we did at the studio and I produced the pre-tape we did from Shawn and Brian's car on the way to Lawler's house. Jerry Lawler produced the segment we did once they got to his house. I said I was not going to get too detailed on this, but this was so damn good, and I think it is important to give details in this instance.

On the January 16 TV, Brian and Stasiak did a live interview challenging Lawler and they were told he was at home. They left to go to his house. We showed a video making it appear it was live from their car driving to the house. Meanwhile, Bill Dundee was live in the studio and he saw that interview of Brian and Stasiak, so he left to go to Lawler's house. We ended the show with Stasiak and Brian arriving at Lawler's. This was pre-taped, but we presented it as live television. We did not have the capabilities of doing live remotes, but TV-5 did a great job of making it seem like it was playing out in real time. Stasiak showed up by himself at the back door and Lawler came outside to fight him. Brian was hiding in the car so once Lawler got the advantage, Brian came out of the car and jumped him. Remember, several weeks before, in another home invasion, Lawler had thrown fire at Stasiak. Brian and Stasiak filled a trash can full of leaves and lit a fire and tried to put Lawler in the burning trash can. Right before they could do that, Dundee came speeding up the driveway, got out, grabbed a shovel and saved the day. I loved this show because it was out of box thinking and it was in line with our slogan of "Expect the Unexpected." It all translated to great television.

We continued to advance the story every week, but we really went in another direction on show #44 on February 13, 1999. Giving credit where credit is due, this was all Lawler's idea. He came up with it, he produced it and it was his baby. It was great, and another example of classic soap opera story telling. Stasiak brought his "sister" Terri to introduce her to Stacy. Terri and Stacy did not get along at all. Terri was not really Shawn's sister but was a member of the production staff for the WWE that worked with Lawler every week. I can tell you this: she was gorgeous. Like so many people over the years who had been around wrestling, Terri loved it and wanted to be a TV star. That was not going to happen in the WWE, but Lawler wanted to make it happen in Memphis. I loved the idea but even if I hadn't, I did not make a habit of saying no to Lawler. We find out what happens later when Lawler and I are not on the same page, so stay tuned. But, with this situation we were on the same page. I knew nobody was better in writing or booking Jerry Lawler than Jerry Lawler himself. It certainly wasn't me, but I was smart enough to realize that. During the Terri debut segment, we had a big family squabble between Terri and Shawn and Lawler and Stacy. To make Shawn mad, Lawler kissed Terri on live TV. Storyline wise, not only did he make Shawn mad, but he also made Stacy mad by seeing him kiss another woman. She ended up slapping Lawler. Now, Terri was a different story. She liked the kiss. There were so many layers to the story all playing out at once and it was fun to watch.

We were building towards a story with Terri and Shawn against Lawler and Staci, but we were not able to go in that direction. Lawler made this deal for Terri for her to work Memphis TV without running it by her immediate supervisor, Shane McMahon. Unfortunately, Shane didn't like the fact she was doing wrestling stuff in Memphis, so he cut it off after one week. He did not want to leave us holding the bag, so he offered to send someone else in Terri's place. We never expected who her replacement would be…or what a hit the change would be.

The replacement he sent was the completely opposite of Terri. We lost the sex appeal that Terri brought but what we got in her place was classic and it led to great TV. Legendary female wrestler Mae Young made her Power Pro Wrestling debut on February 27. Lawler created the unforgettable character of "Mama Stasiak" for Mae to become in PPW. Mae was born in 1923 and became a wrestler in 1939. When she did this story for Power Pro, she had been in the business 60 years and she was 76 years

old. Mae arrived and was furious at her daughter Terri for kissing Lawler. She was also mad at Lawler for his part in the kiss. She was even mad at Stacy, just for being, in her opinion, a “tramp” and trying to take advantage of her son, Shawn Stasiak. This all played out so great and it’s almost impossible to put into words how well everyone did. It couldn’t have been better. What a heel Mae was. She completely embraced the role and had a blast with it. At the time, she even told us that this was the most fun she ever had in the business, which is really saying something as she had been involved for 60 years. By this point, she was not yet involved in WWE television. She played the crazy mama part great. She beat up referees with her purse and she got into a cat fight on television with Stacy. This led to a live main event of Stacy and Lawler against Stasiak and his “Mama.”

I guess video of this story was watched by the creative forces in the WWE and it wasn’t long before Mae was a character on Monday Night RAW. Mae became a worldwide superstar, all because of her exposure in Power Pro, I like to think. So, we can add her to the long list of alumni that passed through Memphis during their wrestling career. We never had the pleasure of working with Mae again. She became a member of the WWE Hall of Fame and sadly passed away in 2014 at age 90.

The Shawn Stasiak story was very successful. We did a few more things with him before he was called up to the WWE, but this was the climax of the story. It was time to go into a different direction with Lawler and Stacy, but even though this was no doubt our top story, we had other stuff going on at the same time. My story with Brandon Baxter had really heated up and we were going to be a big part of great Power Pro success in my hometown of Jonesboro, Arkansas.

CHAPTER 10:

From Beale Street to Bad Street

The Lawler story had been our “A story” for a while, but I always had several stories going on at the same time below the main one. On each show, I tried to focus on two or three stories, have four or five matches and if we had live events, we focused on hyping those.

I wouldn’t say I had given up on Memphis live events, but for several different reasons, that was basically a big financial risk. Our next success in live event business came in a place close to my heart, my hometown of Jonesboro, Arkansas. Jonesboro had a great history with wrestling. I grew up going to the weekly matches every week at the old American Legion Arena. In 1980 they tore the old building down and built a beautiful 2,000 seat arena on the same property. For a couple of years after that, they continued to present Memphis wrestling every Saturday night. When the Memphis office gained control of Nashville, they eventually changed Jonesboro to monthly events. The American Legion sold the building and property to a hospital in the early 90’s and that took regular wrestling events away from Jonesboro. Early on, Power Pro ran live events at the National Guard Armory but had no luck. We also promoted an event at the Jonesboro fairgrounds that we did great with, but that building was not available often. Eddie Marlin had promoted matches in Jonesboro at The Earl Bell Community Center. The Community Center was also the site of the public swimming pool at the time and was the place where I learned to swim. The Community Center had hosted wrestling back in the 50’s with the original Gorgeous George appearing. Jonesboro was a great wrestling town and the Earl Bell was a great venue. I had tried to rent the Earl Bell before for Power Pro but was unsuccessful. I needed an in and I got it. I got a phone call from the General Manager of the KFIN radio station, Gary Harpole, who wanted to co-promote events with us. It was a great relationship. They would promote our shows and we would provide them with wrestlers for a lot of their events. We had several great shows at the Earl Bell. The greatest thing that came out of this situation was it started Brandon Baxter’s relationship with the radio group. Jumping ahead for a moment, after Power Pro was closed, Brandon started a career in radio that is still going today.

By November of 1998, I gave up the wrestling office in Memphis and worked out of my home. Because he helped me with the running of the company, Brandon lived in Jonesboro as well. Because he lived there, he did a lot of stuff on air and became even better known in the Jonesboro market. The relationship really helped our product, but it also set up Brandon's future. Currently, Brandon is the long-time host of the KFIN Morning Show. He also serves as their Director of Operations and has a lovely wife and great son. He's made a home of Jonesboro. Who would've ever thought it?

Brandon and I continued our story on television. We had added the WWE developmental talent to our story and named my heel faction "The Syndicate." I would second guess myself today for going a little too long with it, but overall, it was very successful with TV ratings and did record setting business at the box office in Jonesboro. We had a string of record crowds in Jonesboro, and I must give big thanks to KFIN for giving us the extra exposure.

In the story, Brandon was always outnumbered. He was always getting beat up. The idea of the story was that in a one on one situation, Brandon could beat me, but I always had help. We knew we had a big Memphis card at the New Daisy on Beale Street on a Friday and then a Jonesboro show the following Saturday. I was going to have some WWE talent come in for both shows and I wanted someone new to be Brandon's partner. I did not want it to be just anybody. It needed to be someone special who would make an impact as well as someone that would make sense. We needed Brandon to get help from his hero. Luckily, that hero already worked for the WWE, and even though he rarely wrestled anymore, he could still produce in the ring. Brandon grew up in Dallas, so he was raised on The Von Erichs and The Fabulous Freebirds. Through Jim Cornette in the WWE, we were able to get a commitment from Michael for appearances that would last over several months. The story connected with our audience and Brandon and Michael hit it off as a team. We did all kinds of stuff with Michael and Brandon against me and my Syndicate including a big brawl on the busiest street in town, Beale Street. We had a Bad Street Match as well as getting to have Jim Cornette be involved in a couple of matches. We drew a packed house in Jonesboro, with an "All the Marbles Match" where I got my hair shaved again. During his stay, Michael won the Power Pro Title and Brandon also won control of Power Pro. We even had Brandon and Michael

put me in a hearse and attempt to kidnap me. As you can see, we had lots of crazy material between us during this period. This got Brandon over big in Jonesboro as a hero. The key to it was the excitement and interview skills brought to the table by Michael, as he is one of the legendary talkers in the history of wrestling. This is also one of my favorite Power Pro moments. I will owe Michael forever for all he did. I know it meant a lot to Brandon as well.

I had been a focal point of TV since the first show. We were coming up on the first-year anniversary of Power Pro Wrestling. Brandon and I had been programmed since October. I felt I was getting stale as the evil promoter and that we had explored all areas we could in that program. We needed a change, but I still wanted to feature Brandon. The fans really liked him, and he was good. Not only was he a good manager, he was a good talker and he connected with the people, which is something that happens naturally. One of the marks of a good babyface is that it's easy for them to get sympathy. I wanted to get myself off TV and move Brandon in a different direction. I decided on Derrick King, who was about the same size as Brandon. Brandon was really good in the ring and so was Derrick. I knew they would have better matches than me and Brandon did. I booked a Cage Match in Jonesboro between me and Brandon where I would leave Power Pro if I lost and if Brandon lost, he would lose control of the company. Derrick was a baby face by this time as well. I had aligned them together on TV many times. So, at the end of the match, Derrick climbed the cage and ended up costing Brandon the match. It got a lot of heat and I thought it was great. However, even though the matches were better, Derrick just did not have the credibility that I did as a heel and the program never really clicked. This was my fault. Derrick was still young, and Brandon needed an established heel to work with that the people really disliked. Derrick was not that person at that time. Behind the scenes, it was becoming an issue as well. It was one thing that I took up TV time. It was another thing when Brandon and Derrick started getting so much time. The WWE representative Bruce Prichard was very upset that they were getting more time than the WWE developmental talent. My debate back then was that all the WWE talent was only here short term and I wanted to continue using some local talent just in case the WWE deal ever went bad. To be honest, Jerry Lawler and Bill Dundee thought I was going in the wrong direction as well. I am trying to see things more honest now and I see that

going with the Brandon and Derrick program was a mistake. It wasn't that I shouldn't have had them feud; I just invested too much TV time in it and probably booked Brandon too strong, instead of continuing along the sympathetic road. They still wrestle against each other today and both are bigger and these days it really works. Both guys continued to appear on Power Pro to the end and we eventually got them in roles better suited for them.

Our WWE developmental deal continued. We were not finished getting new talent. The next guy we got ended up becoming a WWE Hall of Famer.

CHAPTER 11:

The Debut of Kurt Angle

Power Pro was the infancy stage of the well-oiled machine that is the current WWE developmental system that includes the WWE Performance Center and NXT, which has grown into a third brand for WWE. Over the years the WWE would spend more money, add a training center and focus more on the program and building stars for the future. Power Pro was the first developmental territory, but WWE would later add programs in Louisville (OVW), Ohio, and Georgia. I think the advantage Power Pro had over the other developmental areas was that we had live television. This is where the talent could get ready the quickest, often having to think on their feet due to the nature of being on live TV. Up until NXT when developmental became more of a focus, I think that overall, OVW, ran by Jim Cornette, was the best. With Power Pro, it was a work in progress. I am proud of what we did with the talent they sent in and proud of what the talent did for us as well.

The biggest star that we ever had in Power Pro that came from developmental was set to make his debut in March of 1999. I knew for several weeks that Kurt Angle was coming to Power Pro. Most everybody knows the background of Kurt, so I will not spend much time writing about that. We had instant credibility that March when we were able to have the 1996 Olympic Gold Medal winner in our promotion. I had followed Kurt's Olympic career and was thrilled to death that he was coming in. Before his television debut on March 20, 1999, we were able to get a ton of radio, television and newspaper coverage. Kurt could get more positive publicity than anybody we ever promoted and obviously that is because he was legitimate and had a mainstream story that went well beyond pro wrestling. I knew Kurt got his pro wrestling training mainly from my old buddy Tom Prichard, but also from legendary former NWA World Champion Dory Funk, Jr. Like all the other developmental guys, Kurt was moving to Memphis. By that time, Steve Bradley had been sent to us. Steve was a great worker who had worked the independent scene for years. He brought a style and move set that many of our fans had never seen before. A lot of people thought Steve would end up being a big star in the WWE in the

future, but that wasn't meant to be. I don't know what happened, but Steve was eventually released from the program and later passed away at age 32 in 2008. Kurt and Steve were roommates together in Memphis and had some great matches together. I thought it was very classy when Kurt was inducted to the WWE Hall of Fame in 2017 that he called Steve an unsung hero and was thankful for everything Steve did to help his career.

I loved Kurt and loved what he brought to Power Pro Wrestling. This was his first chance to do wrestling TV and to wrestle in front of a live crowd. He was a natural and he was the best in ring performer early in his career of anyone I had ever seen, and I have watched a lot of guys come and go over the years. I knew from the beginning that Kurt would not have a long Power Pro run as the WWE had big plans for him. WWE had paid big money to sign Kurt and they wanted him sooner than later. Even though he was living in Memphis, we were not going to have him every week as the WWE scheduled him all over the country for non-wrestling appearances.

I regret the way I booked Kurt. Even though he had a very long winning streak here and won the Power Pro Championship, he was not here every week and I did a horrible job of keeping him involved in a strong story and having him an event bigger part of the mix. My excuse was that he was not here a lot, but I should have been much smarter planning a major role for him, whether he was on every TV or not. My mistake certainly did not hurt his career, but long term it did hurt Power Pro. You ask the question, what might have been? It's not like I was beating him every night but looking back there is no doubt that I could and should have done a better job booking Kurt. It's a big shame on me.

Kurt debuted on show #49, March 20, 1999, with much fanfare. I remember discussing his first live television interview with Kurt. The WWE agreed with me that he would be a huge babyface and I gave him ideas for an interview. However, his tone was more of a heel, even though he said the points I told him to say. The fans reacted to him like he was a heel. But, very quickly, what he did in the ring got him over as a babyface. In a matter of seconds, Kurt had his first Power Pro win when he defeated the Yellow Jacket (Kevin Lawler) in seconds. It was a great first appearance. He followed that up with impressive wins over Tony Falk, Bulldog Raines, and Steve Bradley over the next few weeks. The match with Steve Bradley was a standout performance from both guys. He was getting over and, just a few weeks into his career, he was having some of

the better matches in the promotion. After making an impact his first four weeks, he then missed several shows in a row while doing other work for the WWE. Again, I should have done better, but in my mind, through no fault of Kurt, he was hard to book because he was not here every week. Kurt came back and had a great Triple Threat Match with Erin O'Grady and Steve Bradley. It was a match of all developmental talent and it was tremendous. Soon, Kurt was gone again. He then returned to work with Glenn Kulka then won an eight-man Elimination Match the week after that. Kurt defeated Derrick King on show #57 on May 15, 1999.

The WWE wanted Kurt to work with the other developmental talent as much as possible. At times, we would get not only developmental talent from WWE, but we would also get veterans who the WWE had no place for and were trying to develop a new character for. This was the case with Solofa Fatu, Jr., better known for his later role in WWE in the Attitude Era as Rikishi. At that time, his biggest success had been as a member of the Head Shrinkers tag team. He had been signed with the WWE and they were in the process of finding a new character for him. That character ended up being Rikishi. But, in Memphis, he was sent here to be "J.R. Smooth." He quickly became the Power Pro Champion. Bruce Prichard was the WWE contact for Power Pro. Kurt, obviously, was a big project for Bruce and he suggested that on a show where Bruce was there, that Kurt would win the championship from JR Smooth on TV. Bruce was very hands on in setting up the match and they had one of the better matches we ever had in the history of Power Pro. Kurt won his first pro wrestling title on May 22, 1999. They had a rematch on June 5 with Angle retaining the title. We continued to have Kurt on a semi-regular basis through October 2 of 1999. As we moved ahead with Kurt, he worked with almost every heel in the company as he battled Mic Tierney, Bradley and Wolfie D among others. Kurt's reign as Power Pro Champion ended August 13, 1999 at the New Daisy Theater in Memphis against his old friend Steve Bradley, who was now being managed by Jim Cornette.

I have nothing but great memories of Kurt's time in Power Pro. I have seen him a few times since those days. Not too long after he left Power Pro, I was at some WWE events and Kurt was great and was happy to see me. However, the next time I saw him was in 2009 at a TNA event in St. Louis where I was there to visit with my old buddy Jeff Jarrett. By that time, Kurt was beat up and in a lot of pain. He was not in a good place mentally and is

on record saying he had severe alcohol issues. I said hello, but he had no idea who I was. I was saddened but now I see him back in the WWE and he’s healthy and happy. I enjoyed knowing Kurt and I’m glad he was a part of Power Pro and happy he has had a Hall of Fame career.

CHAPTER 12:

Trouble in Paradise

To understand my relationship with Jerry Lawler, I must go back to when I was ten and he was in his early twenty's, over 45 years ago. I could write a book on the life and career of Jerry Lawler. This chapter will be one of the longest and hardest to write chapters of the book. his is about the worst time in the period of Power Pro Wrestling, but on a more personal scale, this is the worst time in my relationship with Jerry Lawler. I first met Lawler when I was selling pictures at ten years old. I ring announced his main event match in Jonesboro in my debut age 13. As I mentioned earlier, he gave me my first full time job in the wrestling business and later made me the Assistant Booker and General Manager of the wrestling company. He was one of the major influences in teaching me the business. Without Jerry Lawler, there would be no Randy Hales in the wrestling business, no Power Pro Wrestling and certainly no book for you to be reading right now. I trusted him and he trusted me. We were close, but not hanging out close. We were business close and we worked together very well. The things he was not great at like being organized and paying attention to detail, I was good at. We balanced each other out. He was better at creating characters and coming up with stuff on spur of the moment. I was better when I planned things out. We made a great team. Therefore, from day one, Jerry Lawler was the star of Power Pro Wrestling. He was having fun and, in my opinion, was doing some of his best work ever on television. By that time, he was a bigger star than he ever had been on a worldwide basis as the co-host of Monday Night RAW. He was making more money than he ever had in his career. But, in Power Pro, he was The King. Fans that only watch RAW and see him as the "WWE King" might not know that Lawler always thought of himself as a "wrestler who announces," rather than an "announcer who wrestles." There's a difference. He was born to be a wrestler and that is what he enjoyed doing. I knew that he enjoyed being a wrestler on Power Pro and he liked having a big presence as a wrestler on Memphis television. I found out that a quick decision on my part without much thought put into it could lead to major problems and, unfortunately, that's what eventually happened. This is meant to be a history book, not a

negative book or a “tell all” book. But, to tell the story, I must discuss some negative situations. I can honestly say now, as I approach 60 years old, when I look back at all the negative situations of my life, not just in wrestling, but my entire life, I see that most of the blame can be put on myself and that is the case here. I wish when I was younger, I could have seen this, but back then it was always someone else’s fault. The reason I am struggling with this chapter is because I must admit this in public.

We were approaching June of 1999 and I was thrilled to death with the state of Power Pro Wrestling. We were into our second year and the ratings were good, the television station was happy, our roster was strong, and the WWE relationship was going great. Our television program was getting better every week, most of our live events were successful, and financially, we were stronger than we had ever been. My relationship with Jerry Lawler had never been better. Sadly, trouble was coming, and it would lead to the most negative period in Power Pro history.

In May there were a few weeks in a row that Lawler could not appear at television due to other bookings. He would be back for TV on June 5, 1999. That was the go home television for a live event I had scheduled in Memphis on June 11 at the New Daisy Theater. I needed that TV to focus on the New Daisy hype, so I made the decision to leave Lawler off the show. He would return June 12. It was no big deal, or so I thought. I called Lawler and he said ok and I didn’t think anything else about it. Lawler stayed at home and watched the show and it ended up being the worse show we had ever aired. I was building the show to bring
“Handsome” Jimmy Valiant in as Brandon Baxter’s partner in the main event of the New Daisy show. I built the show around Baxter and Derrick King and ended the show with Brandon booked like Super Man. At the time, I don’t remember if I liked or hated the show. I was in my own bubble, so I might have even liked it at the time. But, as I watch it back now, it was horrible. Lawler, watching the show at home, hated it so much that he called me at the station. He was in a rage and said the New Daisy show would be terrible. He was right. Lawler was so mad that he took the video to the WWE and said that I was pushing two smaller guys, one who wasn’t even a wrestler and was doing a disservice to the WWE developmental talent. We even still had Kurt Angle on the June 5th TV but did not have him on the New Daisy show. This meant he was just in the TV main event but was not really a featured part in the show. So, my one

decision to leave Lawler off the June 5 TV, so I could focus on the promotion of a show that wasn't going to do well anyway, led to Lawler being mad at me and the WWE not being happy with how I was booking their developmental talent. Looking back, that bad decision was all on me and only me.

I knew this was a big mistake, but I thought it could be fixed. I met with Lawler and Bruce Prichard from the WWE and assured them as we moved ahead, I would focus more on not only Lawler, but on the WWE talent as well. I was determined to go back and put my focus on the television show and not spend so much time building for live events, especially ones that were not going to do very good in the first place. I knew that Jim Cornette had moved back to Louisville and became partners with Danny Davis in Ohio Valley Wrestling and OVW was also going to be a developmental territory for the WWE. Cornette had agreed to come to Memphis every week for television and bring talent with him. I thought at the time, that Cornette and his guys and Lawler would be our next major storyline. We were going to also start Cornette's girlfriend Stacy (Synn) as well so she would fit in that story with our Stacy, Stacy Carter Lawler. I still think a major Cornette and Lawler story would have been the best story we had ever presented. I thought I had it all figured out. Lawler was happy with that direction and all was right in the world of Power Pro Wrestling. Everything was all set, but politics would soon get in the way…literally.

During that time, Lawler had announced that he was going to run for mayor of Memphis. This was a big deal and it made all the news outlets in Memphis. I thought, as I'm sure Lawler did, too, that we could use the television show to help his campaign. I didn't have an issue with that whatsoever. I thought Lawler becoming mayor would help not only Power Pro Wrestling, but the city of Memphis as well. TV-5 did not agree. I am not sure, but I believe one of the other candidates complained that Lawler being on TV talking about running for mayor would be unfair. Lawler would still be on RAW, but that was on cable. We were local TV. Lawler and I talked, and I told the TV station that we would not talk about the mayoral race at all. I don't know if they just did not believe me or if they thought it was too much of a risk. TV-5 got their parent company, Raycom Media, involved and their legal team demanded that Lawler not appear on any show during his campaign, which would last months. I argued, pleaded and cried. I did not want this at all. I did not want Jerry Lawler off TV for

months. I was excited about his upcoming story with Cornette. Raycom would not budge and flat out said that they would not air any Power Pro show at all with Jerry Lawler on it. I had to tell Lawler and he was very upset. He even said that I let it happen and that all along I did not want him on the show, which was completely wrong, but I understand how he thought that. I knew that taking Lawler off television would cause a rift in our relationship, but from a talent standpoint, we would be losing our biggest and best star that had been the major focus of our programming and success. I thought our two choices were to close or to continue running TV shows without Lawler and do the best we could to survive until his campaign was over. I decided to go with what we were ordered to do and hoped we could survive. I knew I had Cornette coming in, so I wanted him to be in a major story and I knew I had to add more talent to the roster. Our local talent was doing great and the WWE developmental guys, for the most part, were outstanding. In order to stay afloat, I needed guys with Memphis wrestling history, and I needed them quick. I knew Lawler was unhappy with me, but he had been unhappy before and I knew the relationship could be salvaged.

So, the decision was made, and Jerry Lawler was officially off TV. Lawler and I had always had a work relationship. Neither of us took the time to hang out and neither of us was into talking on the phone unless it was about wrestling. So, I never tried to call Lawler and he never called me. I don't think there was heat on either side, that's just the way things were. Actually, I take that back. I did tell Lawler that I was bringing in Tommy Rich and Doug Gilbert. I'm sure he was less than thrilled, but he was not negative on the idea, saying to do what I had to do in order to survive until he returned. We did not argue but the relationship was tense, and I am sure he blamed me for being off TV. I was focused on what came next and the next major occurrence in Power Pro Wrestling was not good. In fact, it was very, very bad and I think it had the most negative long-term effect on anything that happened, not only in Power Pro Wrestling, but in Memphis wrestling history.

Before the worst happened, we still had to make the best of our attempt at running Power Pro and producing television without our top star, Jerry Lawler. Jerry was not the only big-name star we lost during this time. With Lawler gone, we also lost Stacy, who had also been a major part of our TV since the start. To make matters worse, we then lost Bill Dundee. Dundee

was, without a doubt, the second biggest Memphis wrestling star and had been for the past twenty years. Bill is one of my favorite wrestlers of all time. He was always the work horse of any wrestling company he worked for. Besides being a top star, Bill had tremendous success creatively as a booker in Memphis, Louisiana, North Carolina, and WCW. Bill and I were, and still are, great friends, but like with almost everybody, we didn't always agree on everything. When I started PPW, Bill was one of the first wrestling people I called, and I wanted him to be involved. He was known as one of the best match finish guys in the business. He worked hard and was a major asset both as a wrestler and creatively. He was as pleased as I was that Power Pro was formed and he was a huge part of our earlier shows. Bill and I ended up disagreeing with the direction of the product. I had so many people to please including Lawler, WWE, Dundee, the television station, the rest of the roster, and the fan base. Bill had his belief on how wrestling should be presented. He was more old-school and was more focused on the live events because that is how he got paid. I understand how Bill became unhappy. We had so many goals to reach each week. We had to develop the WWE talent, build up the local Memphis talent, and make the product more in line with what WWE and WCW were presenting. While attempting to juggle all of these at once, we ended up with less of a focus on Bill and were presenting a product that he just didn't like. He became more and more unhappy and less confident that our product was going in the right direction. I don't remember any arguments or blow ups, between us, but Bill decided it was time to move on. A wrestler by the name of Terry Golden had opened Kick Ass Championship Wrestling and had secured television on Channel 30. Bill decided to leave Power Pro and become a part of Terry's new promotion. Even though Bill was gone during this period I'm about to cover, rest assured there is more to the story of Bill Dundee and Randy Hales still to come.

Even though we were losing Lawler, Stacy, Dundee, Samantha and Kurt Angle, I was not in a huge panic. I knew would soon be starting Jim Cornette and we still had the original developmental talent with more names joining the roster shortly. Also, Brian Christopher would be returning after an absence and we had a couple of legends on their way in as well. Jim Cornette has a lifelong love of Memphis wrestling. His focus on moving back to Louisville was to start the developmental there, but for a trooper like Jimmy, the one-thousand-mile round trip from Louisville to

Memphis was worth it. His debut was a surprise as we had the studio lights dim and Cornette attack Brandon Baxter. Then, since I reacted in such an unhappy manner, he attacked me too. I was taken away in an ambulance. This started Cornette's story with Brandon. His debut was on August 14, 1999. Cornette is so good. He does one of the best interviews of all time. He had exposure on national television for years. Cornette being added to our roster really helped us with credibility. Behind the scenes, I was always happy to have creative people that were experienced in booking. I would listen to anybody's ideas, but some people had better ideas than others. I knew that Jim Cornette would be a huge asset to Power Pro Wrestling, and we needed him now more than ever. He would not replace Lawler or Dundee, but he was a legit talent that would help us do compelling television. Going back to my first day as a booker, this is what I always tried to do. I tried to do this with Power Pro as well. I liked to have a balanced roster that included Memphis wrestling legends with young local talent that we could create. From time to time, I also liked adding stars to the mix. With our WWE relationship, we had that opportunity. I considered Cornette to be a Memphis legend that was also a national known talent, so he checked both boxes. I also had Brian Christopher coming back and would be positioning him as a heel. I needed for Brian to have a story and to have someone to feud with. I had a name in mind and the past had proven that this would work, without a doubt.

Until Power Pro started, my favorite time in the wrestling business was 1994-1996. Back then, we had a real good crew that included the two guys that were about to make their debut with Power Pro, Tommy Rich and Doug Gilbert. Tommy had started his career in the Memphis area in 1974 or 1975. He was trained by Tojo Yamamoto, Eddie Marlin and Jerry Jarrett. Tommy spent his first three or four years in Memphis but then left to go to Georgia Championship Wrestling where, on superstation WTBS, he became a national star, even winning the NWA World Championship for a short period of time. I had known Doug since he was eight years ago. His dad, Tommy Gilbert, had been one of my favorite wrestlers since I was a kid. Doug's brother, Eddie Gilbert, was just a year or so older than me. Eddie and I hit it off and we were pretty tight from the start. As a matter of fact, Eddie was the first wrestler to ever talk about insider stuff about the wrestling business to me. The Gilberts were a big part of my first on camera role on the Memphis television show in 1989. Tommy and Doug held me

down while Eddie threw the fire at me. This is a moment that fans still mention to me today, maybe more than anything. Remember, that's close to thirty years ago. When I started booking in 1994, Doug was in a feud with Brian Christopher and I positioned it as a long-term story that was the focus of the promotion for most of the run. It was then that I brought Tommy Rich into the picture as Doug's partner. I thought they made a great team and it made sense. Tommy Rich had even teamed with Doug's brother Eddie in the 1980's to form the New Fabulous Ones. Rich and Doug were very close and they both had a lot of Memphis wrestling history. They were going to be my top tag team and my top two heels in general. That period in Memphis wrestling is best known for the several months long story where Tommy and Doug feuded with PG-13. We even involved Tommy's mother in the story. It drew money because it was classic Memphis wrestling with a focus on personal issues. When I started this story, Tommy and Doug had already drawn money, but they ended up getting PG-13 over to draw money, too. PG-13 would not have gotten over nearly as well without being paired with Rich and Gilbert.

Right as we got to the peak of the story between Rich, Gilbert, and PG-13, something terrible happened that would cause us to go in a different direction, minus Doug, who was on an open-ended leave of absence. It is hard to explain how close the Gilbert family was. Doug looked up to, admired and loved his older brother Eddie. Back in those days, it was common for wrestlers to travel from territory to territory and Eddie was always in great demand, not only in the states, but all over the world. After a run in the states, Eddie made a booking for Jim Cornette's Smoky Mountain Wrestling then headed to Puerto Rico. It was good for Doug professionally to be out on his own and be one of the featured guys, but at the same time, I am sure Doug missed his brother. As Eddie was in Puerto Rico, it was business as usual in Memphis. On Saturday, February 18, we had done TV in Memphis in the morning and we then headed to Nashville for the matches that night. I will never forget that day. I was riding with Wolfie D of PG-13 and we were almost to the Nashville Sports Arena when I got a phone call from Buddy Wayne, our live event promoter. I answered my cell phone, expecting a routine call from Buddy with questions about upcoming schedules. I only wish it had been one of those simple calls. Buddy's son Ken was also wrestling in Puerto Rico at the time and Buddy just heard the worst news he could get from his son Ken. Buddy had then

called to tell me the news. Ken had told Buddy that Eddie had passed away earlier that day in his hotel or apartment. This was shocking news and was devastating to everybody, and I knew that it would be the worst thing to happen to Doug in his life. Back then, not many people had cell phones, including Doug. After TV, he always went back home to Lexington then he came to Nashville, usually around 8:30 or 9, as he was normally in the main event. Tommy Rich would come back to Nashville then go visit his mother before coming to the matches. Buddy made it clear to me that Eddie's family was not yet aware of this terrible news and Buddy felt I needed to figure out how to tell them. Eddie Marlin was at the Nashville matches that night and I went to him right away and let him know. We decided that Eddie would call his old friend/partner Tommy Gilbert and tell him his son had died. It was hard for Eddie to do and I am sure it was the worst news a father could ever get. The last thing Tommy said to Marlin was to tell Doug. Marlin told me I was closer to Doug than he was, and he thought I needed to tell him when he got to the building. That was a lot of pressure on me because there is no right way to give this kind of news. I thought it would be better, at least for me, if I got Tommy Rich to the arena and had the two of us tell Doug together. We were all upset. Jerry Lawler and Brian Christopher had arrived at the arena and I had the duty to tell them. Rich and I went out back to the wrestler's parking lot and waited for Doug. Doug finally arrived, and we told him as soon as he got out of the car. I told him to go home and stay home as long as he needed to. I had Harry Del Rios, better known as the Spellbinder, drive Doug back to Lexington. The funeral was late the next week and was attended by the entire Memphis wrestling roster, friends and family from all over, including one of Eddie Gilbert's idols, Terry Funk. Doug ended up taking several months off and returned when he felt he was ready. This is something that none of us have ever gotten over, especially Doug. Eddie will be remembered as one of the all-time greats.

In order to tell this part of the story, I felt it was important to go back in history and tell more about the relationship between Doug Gilbert, Tommy Rich, and Brian Christopher, since they are the major players in the next events in Power Pro Wrestling.

The date was September 18, 1999, for Power Pro show #75. Brian Christopher had not appeared in Power Pro for months. He was off WWE television as well due to a major injury. It was time for him to return. He

wanted to return as a heel, and we had already used him some as a heel, especially during the Lawler-Stasiak feud. I was fine with that idea because he was a hell of a heel. He could be a hell of a heel in real life as well. By that time, I knew I wanted to bring Tommy Rich and Doug Gilbert back to feud with him and I wanted them as babyfaces. This would be a story based on history. New talent was great. The WWE developmental talent was great, but nothing beats a story based on history and these guys had a lot of it. I was excited about what we had coming up and all the possibilities of where we would go. Brian was very excited as well. I had plotted the beginning of the story, but Brian was so fired up he started giving ideas as well. Unfortunately, that would end up back firing on me later, but I always listened to ideas from the top talent because if they had a personal stake in the creative process, normally the result would be better. I had a very good understanding of the Brian Christopher character, but nobody knew Brian like Brian knew himself. This resulted in a mixture of some classic stuff, a lot of which was very creative, but some that eventually crossed the line of good taste, the last of which was something I don't know if we ever recovered from, but we'll get to that momentarily.

On Brian's debut show, he called me out for his interview. He was mad and let it be known that he thought I had ignored him and pushed all the new talent and forgotten about him. On the next week's show, as a part of the story, I wanted to apologize to Brian by giving him a little gift. I presented him with a nice new TV for his office. Brian responded by wanting to give me a present, as well. He went out to the car and brought his present for me back inside the studio, covered up by a towel. Obviously, the present that I had given him hadn't made him happy, so his present to me was a baseball bat that he used to destroy the TV. It was great wrestling TV and received a lot of heat for Brian. Brian went backstage. In a fired-up interview in response, I was pretty strong and called Brian a prick. Then, Brian rushed back out and busted a light bulb over my head. The attitude era was underway in the other wrestling companies and I felt that was a line that fit the story even though it was Saturday morning TV. In an interview the next week, Wolfie said he was going to "kick ass." This type of language is not something that Dave Brown or the management of TV-5 liked, so we had to be careful. I would push the envelope at other times, but we couldn't do it that often. So, the bottom line was Brian busted the light bulb over my head and left saying he'd never be back. I opened the show

the next week begging Brian to call me on the phone, on air. When he called, I begged him to come to the studio and said that I was going to make things right. Brian agreed to come to get his present. Before he got to the studio, we showed me in the back area with a big huge box. It was obvious that I had someone in the box. I always loved the surprise in the box story for the big reveal that always came at the end. We had a camera in the parking lot to show Brian the moment he arrived. He rushed into the studio and quickly asked if I thought he was stupid. He said he was not a fool and that he knew someone was in the box. Brian had his baseball bat with him, and he said he was going to destroy that person. He started destroying the box with the bat, but the box was empty. More than anything, I think we fooled the audience. In the box was a tape recorder and I told Brian to play the tape. We heard a familiar voice asking Brian why he left his keys in his car. Brian had a panicked look and rushed outside. We cut to a shot of the parking lot showing Doug Gilbert smiling and laughing while sitting in the driver's seat of Brian's car. Brian ran out to the lot, but Doug burned rubber and sped off, leaving the parking lot and turning onto Union Avenue. This was just great television. Brian headed back into the studio and eventually attacked me with the bat. Doug came back, rescued me and made a big comeback on Brian. Doug then did a great interview, and after commercial we ended the show with an interview with Brian that led into a fight between Doug and Brian as the credits rolled. Expect the Unexpected. That was my motto for Power Pro and that is what we delivered, once again.

I always hoped that any story we did would be our next big thing. I thought we hit the jackpot with the debut of this story. I had always been really high on Doug's work and on Doug personally. I thought he could be the top guy. He needed to be the top guy. Even though he had Japan commitments a few times a year, he would be around most of the time. Brian was another story. He was full time in the WWE and his schedule for them was about to fill up. For the time being, my top story was the Doug and Brian feud with the secondary story focusing on Jim Cornette. The other noteworthy story in this period was the debut of Ali Stevens. For the most part, I was very involved in the main story, Cornette had lots of input in his story, and Brandon took care of everything we did with Ali. All three were strong stories. We also had Wolfie D involved in a big story and we were about to change direction with him. Our show on October 2, 1999, (#77) was a great start to a lot of things.

Our next show was on October 9, 1999. On this show we were hyping a live event that night at the New Daisy Theater. We had a special appearance from the legendary Sputnik Monroe, who was going to be a special referee at the New Daisy event. Cornette came out and had a great confrontation with Sputnik. Cornette is a big fan of the history of all pro wrestling, especially Memphis wrestling. Jimmy might've paid me to be on a live Memphis TV appearance with Sputnik. The segment was short, sweet and good. Since many of our fans were younger, they probably did not enjoy this as much as Jimmy and I did.

We spent a lot of time on the show putting heat on Cornette and his Organization. He hinted that Brandon would be joining his group. Brandon did not react good to Dave Brown's reaction to this possibility and he came out and surprisingly pushed Dave, grabbed him and Dave demanded to know what was wrong with Brandon. Corey Maclin was off for this show and I was sitting in with Dave. Brandon and I argued, and he stormed off when I said I hoped it wasn't true that Brandon had become a traitor. We got a few more weeks out of this but I wish we would've milked this story out because what we did was good. We could've gotten a lot more out of it, though.

We did a great follow up to the previous week's Doug-Brian program. We had advertised that Doug was wrestling Brian that night at the New Daisy. Brian was wheeled out for his interview on a gurney. Doug came out to harass Brian on the gurney and accused Brian of being a coward and trying to get out of wrestling him later that night by faking an injury. As Doug was distracted, Brian sprayed him with something in his eyes and then put Doug on the stretcher and wheeled him out to the parking lot. In a great camera shot, Brian was going to wheel Doug out into the traffic on Union Avenue! Thankfully for Doug, a car backed up and blocked the way at the last second. Doug got off the stretcher and they had a heck of a brawl in the parking lot. We ended the show hyping the show at the New Daisy that night.

Show #79 was live on October 16, 1999. We featured more stuff from Cornette and his Organization, including a Cornette vs Wolfie D match with the debut of Seven. We had a big entrance for Brian that day. We had hyped from the start that our TV Main Event was going to be Brian vs Doug. Back to our opening segment, we went back out to the parking lot for a shot of Brian and a bunch of fans arriving at the studio. I bet Brian had 40 or 50

people with him. The idea was Brian had brought his own fans with him that were better than the “normal” fans in the studio. Brian did an interview in which he presented a fan with a gift, which was a beautiful clock with Brian’s picture on it. Doug ended up coming out and busting the clock over Brian’s head. This was more really good stuff to move their story along. The main event of that show was Doug against Brian. At the finish, Doug had Brian almost finished when a mystery man hit the ring to help Brian get the advantage. The mystery man took off his hat and jacket and revealed himself to be The Spellbinder. Spellbinder busted a bottle over Doug’s head and the two of them got a rope and hung Doug over the top rope. Once again, going back to our “expect the unexpected” motto, Tommy Rich returned to save Doug.

After a few great weeks of TV, Doug was scheduled to go to Japan, so we had to do the follow up without Doug. Doug would be returning on November 6. We were about to go off the rails, and it all happened quickly and to a horrible extent. I had been a part of the process when I had seen wrestling companies go down, but it was always a gradual process. I had never seen this in such a short period of time and I certainly had never been responsible for a company that almost lost everything in a matter of weeks. Before I get into these next three shows, I first want to make something very clear. I want you to know who is responsible for all that went down: I am. It was my company. The television contract was in my name. The WWE deal was in my mind. I was the promoter, the booker, the head writer of the television and the Executive Producer of the TV show. No, I didn’t know how this would end up, but I should’ve known better than to agree to put any of this on TV. I knew my talent. I knew Tommy Rich was a ribber who liked to stir stuff up and who liked to screw with people. I loved Tommy, but that is who Tommy was. I also knew Doug. Doug was quite passionate. He took his family legacy seriously and had the same wrestling philosophy that I did, which was funny meant no money. I had always believed that, but I knew the wrestling world was changing and I knew it couldn’t be all blood and guts any more, either. We needed humor, but that wasn’t the type of material I was good at creating. I also knew that Doug could be hot headed and be easily stirred up and heavily influenced by Tommy. He trusted Tommy more than anybody and he truly valued his opinion. I also knew Brian. Brian was currently full time with WWE, and he was there to see the success they were having. Brian liked humor in

wrestling, and he did humor very well. Brian also would come up with ideas that could be over the top and border on being way too much. I knew the players. I should've gone with my gut and not went with something I wasn't comfortable with. I should've predicted what Tommy would think about these segments. I should've thought about how Doug's family would react to them as well. Now, I had featured both Tommy Gilbert and Doug's mother Peggy on the show before, so I assumed they would be cool with the ideas, but still, I should've asked them. I couldn't get ahold of Doug, but I should've called Tommy or Peggy to get permission. I did nothing about my concerns, and I greenlighted the idea. What I did was the last thing I should have done: I simply did nothing. I allowed it to happen. I certainly did not expect the action/reaction we ended up getting, but I knew all the players. I guess you could say I was guilty of greed. I was hungry for ratings and success. If I knew how things would turn out, I certainly would have vetoed the segments and went in another direction. If I had said no, Brian would have been mad, but he had been mad at me before and he would've gotten over it. I also want to make it completely clear that I am not blaming Brian or anybody else. Brian did not come up with this idea because he was being mean spirited or trying to make fun of anyone. Those were not his intentions. He wanted it to be great. He wanted it to be entertaining. He wanted it to get record ratings. He wanted it to sell out the live events and make money. There is no way in hell that he thought it would lead to what happened next.

I have never watched this stuff back, even though it's been almost twenty years since it aired. I was going to watch it back for this chapter. I have the DVD right in front of me. But instead, I found some good notes and read some great reviews of those segments. I just can't watch those shows because they embarrass me, and it hurts. It still hurts.

With Doug out of the country, Brian Christopher and The Spellbinder did an interview on live television in which they imitated Doug Gilbert and Tommy Rich. It was a parody. I am going to steal a line from someone else when I say that for the people that like this kind of stuff, this is the kind of stuff they love. It was very well performed, but it was just too personal. It ended up getting very personal making fun of Doug, Tommy and Doug's family. We had Tommy come out to attack them, but he was held back by security. The show ended with a Tommy Rich-Brian Christopher main event, which ended when Spellbinder got involved. We ended that show

with heat. The next week, on October 23 for show #80, we did more imitations and more parodies. Doug was scheduled to be back the next week and we were hyping another live event at the New Daisy that Saturday night. The intention was to have Doug angry and return the next week looking for vengeance on TV. This would climax in his quest for revenge that night at the paid event at the New Daisy Theater. We did a couple of things on this show, one of which is what really got the big heat with Tommy and especially with Doug. Brian and Spellbinder did an interview where they imitated Tommy and Doug again. Then, while dressed like Tommy and Doug, they wrestled Ken Raper and the Loose Cannon. They intentionally lost the match to get the story over that Tommy and Doug are losers. Brian and Spellbinder then did an interview where they were dressed up like Tommy and Peggy Gilbert. Now, I wish I could say that I didn't know this was going to happen, but I did know. I heard the idea in advance, and I saw them dressed up before they went out to do the interview. I knew, and again, I admit I did nothing about it and that it was horrible judgement, horrible business and horrible producing on my part. It was also being a horrible friend because I cared a lot for Tommy Rich and the entire Gilbert Family. I let this go out and happen on live television.

This will not be easy to write about and by the time you have read this, I will have rewritten it a thousand times. I plan to have Doug read this part of the book in advance and offer him the chance to write a response. This show occurred on November 6, 1999 and it would be the last time I would talk to Doug Gilbert for a decade. Doug called me late Friday night, November 5. We talked about Japan and about how the TV had been geared while he was in Japan. I don't know if I told him that I wasn't a big fan of the segments or not, although that wouldn't matter at this point. He knew who had the final say and he knew I was the person to sign off on the deal. He asked what I had planned for TV the next day. He said he heard the stuff had been heavy and that he wanted to make sure we had something good ready to happen next. We did not argue. It was not a tense conversation. But, most of our conversations always started out fun, with plenty of jokes and ribbing. There was none of that in this conversation, but it was still friendly. We were both all business. As he hung up the phone, he told me he would see me in the morning. I knew he was probably not really happy about this, but I didn't know he was as angry as he was. I would find that

out the next morning. Tensions were high and a storm was brewing as we headed into the studio.

As I read the recap, we started off the November 6 show in very, very bad taste. Until I just read it, I did not even remember that we did this. We started off with Brian's brother, Kevin Christian, in a very morose tone, announcing that Tommy Rich and Doug Gilbert had passed away earlier in the week. He said he wanted to bring out the two guys who were taking the news the worse, Brian Christopher and Spellbinder. They began to have a "mock" funeral. I can't tell you how bad this was. It's tough to put into words how much I regret that all these segments took place. This is hard to write about. Then it was time for Doug to make his big return and do his interview for the match at the New Daisy. The prior segments were done for one purpose and that was to get heat on Brian and Spellbinder so that when Doug and Tommy hit the ring, they would go crazy. And they did. It was maybe the best reaction we had gotten in that studio in years. Doug and Tommy fought them all the way out the studio door. Then, Tommy did an interview and Doug finished it up. I was in the control room, on the headset, producing the show. Brandon Baxter was in the set next to me, also on headsets. It was obvious from the start that Doug was really mad. Now I can see why. I am thankful now that Doug has forgiven me, and we are just as close today as we were years ago in the good ole days. Doug started the interview by hammering me. At that point, Brandon asked me if I wanted to go to break. I don't know if I was shell shocked, in disbelief, or if inside I knew that would be horrible for us to do, and I just let him rant. I don't know what I was thinking, but I did not go to a break when I should have. Doug then talked about Jerry Lawler being Brian Christopher's father. That had never been addressed on a Memphis wrestling program before. Upstairs, Brandon once again asked me if I wanted to go to a commercial. I ignored Brandon and let the segment continue. Doug then said something negative about Jerry Lawler, which I won't repeat in this book. The past is the past, and we have all moved on. After Doug said what he said about Lawler, I immediately cut to a break. Sadly, the damage had been done. The reason I write about it in this book is to once again apologize to Doug. Hopefully, as I go into the next part of the Power Pro story, it will make more sense.

I don't have a clear memory on what happened next with Doug. I think it was calm. I remember Corey Maclin came up from the studio and it did

get loud between Corey and Doug. I was in shock. I think Doug said he was going to the hotel and if I still wanted him at the New Daisy show that night, to call him. I remember going out at the end of the television show to say that due to his live comments, Doug had been fired. I also remember having my post show meeting with Dave, Corey and Brandon after the TV show up in the second-floor conference room. I remember Lawler showing up, walking in the room and asking where Doug was. I said he was gone and that he was no longer a part of Power Pro Wrestling. Lawler didn't even look at me. He asked for the tape, which I believe I gave to him, and then he walked out of the room and left the building.

That night, Tommy Rich did show up. He was booked in two matches. He worked one match and then left without doing the main event. Brian also showed up and he told me that this would be the last show he would work for Power Pro.

It's often easy to second guess decisions. What I should have done was to go over to Lawler's house and talked things out with him. Months later we ironed it all out, but I really didn't know what to say at the time of the incident. Against the advice of Dave, Corey and Brandon, I did not go meet with him or call him immediately afterwards. I guess I was trying to avoid the situation. Without a doubt, the weeks around that show were the worst decisions I ever made in the wrestling business. To make matters worse, once it occurred, I handled the situation in the worst possible way by pretty much not handling it at all. I've tried to recall the events in this period as honest as possible based on my memories of how things went down in the moment.

I left the New Daisy that night and headed back home to Jonesboro. It was a stressful trip home with Brandon, and I got very little sleep the next few days. I knew we would have fall out from this. I had many ideas going through my head of what would happen next. I worried about lawsuits. I wondered if the TV station would cancel the show entirely. I certainly thought we would immediately lose our developmental deal with WWE. I also thought my lifelong relationship with Jerry Lawler was over for good.

I did not look forward to the next week. I had no idea what to expect. Ironically, the "Expect the Unexpected" slogan we often used for Power Pro had come true in the worst possible way. We had done eighty-two shows. I had no idea if there would be an eighty-third show. We officially had trouble in paradise.

CHAPTER 13:

Life Without Lawler or WWE

The next few months of Power Pro Wrestling had a lot of hard times as we entered a phase of almost starting over. I will talk about some of those hard times, but after watching these shows back, I remembered we had some really good programming as well. Even in the hard times, PPW wasn't all gloom and doom.

The fallout from the November 6th show came quickly. The Vice-President and General Manager of WMC TV-5 called early Monday morning to say the station had received several complaints from viewers about the show. He also feared that Raycom Media was concerned about a lawsuit due to what had transpired that day. I explained the full story and, while he understood, he warned me that the wrestling program didn't need to become more trouble to the station than it was worth. We still had over a year left in our initial agreement, but I knew I need to fix the direction of the ship quickly.

My next issue came after a phone call from the WWE's Bruce Prichard, who oversaw all developmental talent and territories. He was most concerned that the co-host of their main show, RAW, was portrayed in a very negative light. He was also concerned about the developmental talent assigned to Power Pro and the talent they had scheduled to come down in the future. They were tempted to pull our developmental deal immediately, but there was one person who could save my deal. Bruce brought up that Jim Cornette was already supervising developmental in Louisville and he was also appearing for Power Pro almost every week as a talent. Bruce suggested that they would stick with us only if I had Jim Cornette take over the writing duties for Power Pro television.

Cornette and I had been friends for years. I loved his Smoky Mountain Wrestling product in the 90's and we had worked closely together at times. I also watched the OVW television as well. Cornette grew up on Memphis wrestling, knew the history of the product and we got along quite well. I agreed to the proposal.

Cornette's writing tenure in Power Pro lasted about eleven shows. Jimmy likes to plan like I do and was always very organized. Even though

we lost a couple of the developmental talents, they also sent new talent to us. Cornette also wanted to bring some of his local OVW talent to Power Pro. I understood, because if I had taken over the writing of OVW TV, I would have probably brought some of my key local talent along with me. Even though Jim grew up on Memphis wrestling, he had been away for probably 25 years. I felt his shows had more of an influence of Bill Watt's Mid-South Wrestling and Dusty Rhodes influence from the NWA than Memphis did. Cornette geared his shows towards athletics and more of a technical product. My writing style was more Memphis style, which meant it was often wilder and crazier with more of a focus on expecting the unexpected. I think the drastic sudden change of not only talent, but also style caused the ratings to take an almost immediate drop. Creating was what I enjoyed doing more than anything, so by agreeing to Bruce's deal, I had lost out on getting to partake in writing the television. I was not the only person who felt this way as I heard from not only my key people on the wrestling side, but also television station management, production people, the fans and Dave Brown. Change is not always bad, and if he had more time, maybe the fans would have been reeducated and the audience would've returned. By no means did I hate everything he did. As a matter of fact, I really liked parts of the direction he was going in. But after less than a month, I felt it wasn't working. However, at the same time, I felt we needed the WWE and I knew if I took back over, we would lose it. I had made this change to save the deal, but I didn't realize that the deal wasn't saved for long, just a little under three months.

Meanwhile, Terry Golden was still operating Kick Ass Wrestling and he started having discussions with Jerry Lawler. The idea was appealing to Lawler because he also wanted a presence on Memphis television. Terry was interested because he had already signed Bill Dundee, and now not only would he add Lawler, but through Lawler would get the developmental deal.

I got a phone call from Jim Ross on Saturday, January 29th. He asked if I could meet him and Bruce Prichard at the Memphis airport that Tuesday afternoon. I instantly knew this meeting couldn't be good news. What I didn't know was that early that same day, JR and Bruce met with Lawler and Golden and made the agreement to switch the developmental deal to Golden.

I went to the meeting on Tuesday. It was short, sweet and friendly. JR was great. He got right to the point and quickly informed me that our working agreement and developmental deal was over…just like that. It all happened so fast. He said he would let me have any of the talents that I needed to use in order to finish up their ongoing storylines. He also agreed to continue to pay us our deal for a short period of time. I shook both of their hands, thanked them for everything they did and told them I was sorry it had ended up like this. JR said he hoped we would work together again down the road. At the time, JR was much more optimistic than I was because I did not think there would be any way we could work with Lawler or the WWE again.

Just like that, I had lost my television writer along with most of my talent as well. Financially, I was also losing a good chunk of revenue. Most of all, this reshuffling of the deck meant I now had competition on Saturday morning television and that competition had Lawler, Dundee and the WWE relationship. My only advantage was that we were on the stronger, more established station and I still had a live television show. Even though I had the option to have all the talent back for one more TV, I decided to ask for just a few. Cornette was going to come do the television and he offered to write that TV. I knew we would have to start over anyway and I decided that I would just use Cornette on that TV as a talent, and that I would write the February 5th show, along with Brandon Baxter.

I just had one story that I felt I needed to wrap up and that was the Jim Cornette story. Over the last several months I had been bullied and beaten up for story line purposes. We had put a lot of time into this story, so with Cornette on the way out, I needed to come out on top in the story. We booked a Lumberjack Strap Match on television between me and Jim and we built it up the first half of the show and did the match at the thirty-minute mark and I ended up getting my hand raised. The Jim Cornette era in Power Pro Wrestling had officially ended.

I knew Power Pro Wrestling was on the ropes and that I needed a new plan and direction ASAP. We had to start over. I knew everything we had lost. I knew we had already lost part of our audience. I knew I needed help on the writing front. I felt Brandon and I would work together well. He had already proved himself by not only getting himself over against all odds but also, he had discovered and came up with the idea for Ali, who was getting over in a very big way. I wanted Brandon to take charge of the local young

talent by giving some of them new characters and really focus on fresh, original ideas. Brandon was more familiar with the new trends in that day's wrestling product than I was, so I felt he could do a better job than I could in laying out matches and angles. I was still very good at the details, organization, formatting television shows and crafting long term storylines. The two of us were a perfect match. Not only did I know what we were up against, I knew what assets had. I knew we had to give the viewers what they had not gotten over the last several months. I had to give them the Memphis wrestling action they were used to. I might not be able to give them Lawler or Dundee anymore, but I felt I could give them Memphis wrestling better than anybody. I knew we needed to bring in as many Memphis legends and established talents as we could find and afford. The Memphis wrestling fans were used to seeing the wildest action and craziest stories out there. They were also used to our local talent as feature acts and knew they could rely on Power Pro to always provide unexpected moments and quality stories. I planned to put on the craziest and wildest television show I could with the addition of fresh young talent and new ideas. We now had a blank slate and it was time to deliver.

Starting over meant just that: we needed to start over, completely. It was time for the Power Pro reboot. I was determined to focus on our bread and butter. In order to do that, I had to make the television show the most compelling television show ever produced with a mix of veteran talents, new talents, stipulation matches, unique camera locations, out of the box involvement from our announcers, and shows loaded up with action and stories that built from week to week.

The new era of Power Pro Wrestling ended up lasting 22 weeks. Over that period of time, I brought back as many familiar Memphis talents as possible, including, Robert Gibson of the Rock N Roll Express, Tommy Rogers of the Fantastics, Wolfie D (featured in the PG-13 character for a while before turning heel), Tony Falk (later repackaged by Brandon as 2 Falk 4 Sure), Handsome Jimmy Valiant, Sir Mo of Men On the Mission (with a new partner and new manager as the Regulators), Moondog Spot, the return of the Spellbinder, Koko B. Ware and others. Even if I just had the talent for one week, I would heavily promote the appearance. I would also write that person into one of our lead stories to give the younger talent and their story instant credibility.

Brandon also focused on the young talent, some of which had to be repackaged. He made sure we had stories for Derrick King (who had a series of matches with Wolfie D for the Power Pro Title that were great), Lance Jade (who was always a good worker but had not shown much personality), Blade, Alan Steel and more.

More than ever, we were a television show first and foremost and we needed to put as much of our focus as possible into making show the best it could be. Brandon and I had to involve anyone the viewers cared about into the story, even the announcers, at times. Now, I am not talking about doing something very physical, but they needed to side with the babyfaces and be the moral compass of the show. If they did not like something someone did, they needed to be more vocal. They needed to be more authoritative. We had one thing with Brandon where Dave really told him off and they almost got physical. While we didn't fully go there, we approached the line of doing it and the fans went crazy.

I also wanted to change my role. I had pretty much gotten away from the heel role that I had at the beginning of the Power Pro run. I would still appear on the show from time to time, but now I envisioned myself in more of the Eddie Marlin role. Eddie was a former wrestler who became the story line match maker for the company and the babyface spokesman for the company. I wanted to be in that role, but I also wanted to use myself in storylines when the story necessitated it. I had been around Memphis wrestling for decades and I hoped the fans still cared about me. As long as I did not overdo it like I did when I was a heel, I thought we could have interesting stories with me involved as the authority figure when needed.

Brandon came up with an idea that I thought was crazy. It didn't have anything at all to do with wrestling, but even though it was wrestling, it was television, and this was unlike anything we had ever done on Memphis wrestling. I had told him to think outside the box and the person who he ended up having the outside the box idea for was me. I went with the idea. I figured we would never know if we didn't try. Derrick King's roommate at the time was named Chris Wyatt. He came to the shows with Derrick all the time and we had even made him a heel manager. Brandon's idea was to involve Chris with me. We did a deal where one week on television, I got in the ring to break up a fight and got beat up. CB Wyatt was the first person to the ring, and he rushed to check on me, shouting for help. He looked like he was about to cry. Dave even asked Corey what was up with Chris'

reaction as he and I had never been linked together before in storyline. For the next week couple of weeks, CB asked Dave to have me come out to the set during his interviews. I never came out for a while. One week, he said he had some big, life changing news and that I would regret it if I heard this from the control room. He said I really needed to hear it face to face. Finally, I came out to the set.

Chris started asking me questions. He started out by saying that he always heard that when I was a young man in the wrestling business and traveled with the wrestlers, that I was wild. I told him that was true, but I had grown up a long time ago and that I now taught a youth group at my church, which was true. I said I also had young nephews and nieces that loved me, and that I now tried to set a good example and no longer did that silly stuff anymore. He asked if I had ever partied with the girls back in the day. I laughed, not taking it seriously, and told him we didn't need to go there. Then, he asked if I knew a girl named Julie that had been a groupie back then. I quickly had a shocked expression and almost went down to my knees. I started taking him serious at that point. He then dropped a big bombshell when he said that Julie was his mom and that I was his dad! Dave and Corey were shocked, and the audience went crazy. I was speechless at first, especially when Chris followed this news up by saying he would now be known as "CB Hales." I asked him how old he was, and he said 20. I asked why he waited 20 years before revealing his news, which was conveniently coming out as I was running a successful wrestling company. He said his mom had tried to protect both of us, so he had also just found out. I told him he was lying, and I told him not to ruin my reputation, especially with my family. I grabbed him by the throat before Dave and Corey restrained me. He said that he could prove it if I took a blood test during TV the next week. I agreed to take the test to shut him up.

On the next week's show, a package was delivered to the station and the papers said it was positive, which meant I was indeed CB's father. He even brought his "mom" to meet me at TV and I admitted I had known her and had been with her when I was younger. The girl that we picked was from Nashville and is still a good friend of Tony Falk. After that news, CB went on a power trip and started telling everybody he was second in charge because he is a Hales. In story line, because of that news, I was distracted and didn't realize he was trying to take power by using the fact that he was my son. The fans really got into the story and I felt it helped our ratings

because it was something different. It was a real fun story to be a part of and is, to this day, one of my favorite things I have ever done…even if it was a bit silly.

Eventually, I discovered the papers were phony and this was a devious idea from Brandon Baxter to help CB get control of my company and my "fortune." I ended up beating CB up on television and then Julie attacked me, and I pushed her down. The original idea was for me to give her a bulldog headlock to the ring mat, but Dave was really against that idea. He did not think that the wrestling promoter, a businessman associated with the television station, should be physical against a woman. We ended up having Tony Falk come out to help me and he ended up putting her over his knee and giving her a spanking. In today's world, there would be no way we could do that as the storyline would be too much for Saturday morning TV. I think I'm correct in saying, that, for the most part, this was my last appearance on Power Pro Wrestling until our very last show, which was about a year away.

Our first show in the new era was on February 12. We would stick with this new direction until July. I am not saying this entire period was classic wrestling that everything was fun and games. But we did the best with the hand we had been dealt. I am very proud of this period for the TV we produced and by doing so without having Lawler, Dundee, or the WWE deal to rely on. We had survived.

CHAPTER 14:

The Return of The King and The Superstar

The ship was not sinking, but we still had work to do. We had made it through the worst part of the storm, and I felt we had presented a great product for several months in a row. Still, our talent was getting a little stale and I knew if we didn't add some fresh talent to the roster, we would eventually be in a decline. I thought even though we did some good stuff overall, the period between July and September was mostly weak television with flimsy ideas.

We were missing one key element: having a Memphis wrestling legend on our roster and involved in a top story. Luckily, a person who filled that role better than anyone besides Jerry Lawler ended up calling us. Bill Dundee had been involved with Terry Golden's promotion, but I think he missed doing live wrestling on Channel 5. He realized that he'd have more exposure and would be more involved with us than he was with Terry. By this point, Terry had added Lawler as well as the WWE developmental talent and Bill saw his role reduced. It was almost the same situation that had occurred in Power Pro. When you deal with the WWE, you commit to using their talent as much as possible. Since they are paying you to do so, you had to do it. Bill did not reach out directly to me, but he called Brandon Baxter who, at that point, was heavily involved in the creative process for Power Pro Wrestling. Brandon knew that we needed talent and that I'd love to have Bill return. Bill had seen the entertainment aspect become a bigger factor in the product that all wrestling companies were presenting. To freshen his own act up he started using more progressive ideas, including incorporating several young ladies into his entourage.

Bill returned on July 22 and it ended up doing well. Bill had recently become an owner at a gentleman's club near Jackson, TN. This was a real successful venture for Bill and something that he enjoyed doing. His wife at the time, Samantha, was also involved in the venture. I wish I had firsthand stories to tell about this, but I never had the chance to visit. But, if I could not go see the girls, Bill made sure that the girls came to us. Every Saturday, Bill would bring a few of the ladies to TV with him and they escorted him to the ring. Bill saw where the business was headed, so he

wanted to add some showbiz into his television image, too. I had mixed emotions about this, but, for the most part, I liked what we did with Bill. We had missed the developmental talent on the show, but the main issue we had was that we needed more depth to our roster. Or at the least, we needed to feature local Memphis wrestling legends and have them involved in feature stories. With Bill returning, we were on the right track.

They say time heals all wounds. By this point, I knew that for the good of the product and for the long-term success of the company, we needed Jerry Lawler back. We had gone way too long without any contact at all. I was too stubborn, nervous and scared to reach out to him. He was not going to be the first to reach out, but I knew that he would much rather be on the live TV- 5 wrestling show. Brandon had been trying to get me to reach out to Lawler for a while. Dave Brown and Corey Maclin also wanted me to get Lawler to come back into the fold. Around this time, Corey started telling me if I wanted control when the TV contract expired, I needed Lawler involved with Power Pro Wrestling. Finally, Dave and Corey met with Lawler and he expressed interest in returning. They asked if I would talk to Lawler and I said I would love to. Lawler called me one afternoon. It was strange, as it was just like old times. It wasn't awkward or full of tension. There was no talk about the events of the past. It was a routine call, basically focusing on planning the creative. We brainstormed and decided to base his return on reality. We advertised it as a request from the television show to talk about why he has not been on TV-5 and hyped it over a period of a few weeks.

Jerry Lawler returned to Power Pro on October 7, 2000. In his return promo, Lawler talked about the fact that I focused so much on new wrestlers that I could control, which led to him being phased out. He blasted the entire roster and didn't hold anything back. I didn't appear in the segment, and even though it was important he brought my name up, the focus had to be on the actual wrestlers. This couldn't just be about me and Lawler. Even though we had done a successful program together, it was old news by the year 2000. I didn't need to be a part of the story at all. We had our roster go out one at a time to confront Lawler and he had verbal confrontations with all of them. Brandon told Lawler he needed to leave and never return, and that if he didn't, they would throw him out. Lawler stubbornly responded, saying maybe they would and maybe they wouldn't. He said if he was attacked, he would return next week…with backup. The

Power Pro guys pounced and started giving Lawler a beating. Eventually, Lawler made a comeback on the entire crew, but was stopped as he was outnumbered. He was then literally thrown out of the building. Wolfie D got carried away and ended up throwing him a little too hard through the back door, busting the window out in the process. Lawler had some bad cuts from the glass afterwards. It was a fantastic segment and a great visual to close the show. It was October 7, 2000, and all was good in the world! The King was back!

CHAPTER 15:

WWE Developmental Part Two

Lawler had mentioned in our first conversation that we would once again get the use of the WWE developmental talent on television as soon as possible. The deal would start with an invasion of Power Pro by Terry Golden's Memphis Championship Wrestling crew. Within a matter of weeks, we made the announcement of an open-door policy with MCW, who still had the developmental deal and who were still doing television. We got the option of using the WWE developmental talent in any way we wanted. The assortment of talent that was in MCW at the time was impressive and I wanted to use them as well as I could. My relationship with Terry Golden was tense and it was hard for both of us to work together but we made it work as best we could. The main thing I had to offer WWE was the use of our established live television show. WWE realized the value that had to their talent who they wanted ready as soon as possible. The idea was that working on our live, fast paced show would better prepare them for the same live show atmosphere they would encounter on the main roster while working on RAW and Smackdown. WWE Smackdown had started airing weekly in August of 1999, which meant WWE now had 2 extra hours of television to fill, which theoretically would open up more slots on the main roster for developmental talent to move up to work in.

After a few weeks of using the talent, I had a meeting with Jim Ross and he offered me an official agreement, with more money than our prior deal was for and also with more talent available to use. By the end of October, the deal was official.

Developmental was in its infancy in 1998 when we first started out. It had always been a work in progress. As I wrote earlier, there are huge differences in what it was in 1998 and what it has become now with NXT and the WWE Performance Center. By 2000, it was so much different than it had been even in 1998. The main difference between Power Pro and Ohio Valley Wrestling was that OVW was also a training center where Power Pro was not. By 2000, they had added a training center for Memphis Championship Wrestling as well. WWE would send in coaches to evaluate how the talent was progressing in the ring and on promos. William "Steve"

Regal was one of the coaches. Once we had our deal back, the WWE now had two different promotions in Memphis. It was awkward at times, but it worked. Regal soon left to go back to the WWE main roster, so we did not work with him in Power Pro at all. From everything I heard, he did a great job.

Pretty early on, I started going to the training center almost every day. Obviously, I didn't work in the ring with the talent, but I would work with them on their characters and promo ability. I would also work with them on whatever we had planned for them to do at television. I felt taking the time to do this was really beneficial and made our television show better. The WWE was looking for a new head coach and I was thrilled to death with their choice. Beautiful Bobby Eaton moved to Memphis to take over Steve Regal's duties. Bobby, a long-time member of the Midnight Express tag team, was one of the best wrestlers in the country, but was also considered to be one of the nicest human beings in the business. Bobby and I had history from when he had worked the Jonesboro territory. I would drive from Jonesboro every day to go to the training center and Bobby was staying in a hotel. Bobby's family was still living in Charlotte. He eventually started coming back to Jonesboro with me and he ended up staying at my house, even after Power Pro closed. Bobby later ended up in Ohio Valley Wrestling. Even though Bobby was a great talent, he was not the best teacher or communicator. Bobby's role as a coach did not last past his OVW days. I also included Bobby as part of the Power Pro roster, and he did real good stuff for us.

Overall, this group of developmental talent was better than what we originally had in late 1998. While we didn't have a Kurt Angle, we did have who I think is a future Hall of Famer, without a doubt. The American Dragon was a small, masked wrestler that was trained by Shawn Michaels. Dragon was a student of the business, especially Japan. He was the most dedicated athlete in the group and not only that, was one of the most dedicated wrestlers I had ever seen. He was also one of the nicest talents I had ever worked with. He was just starting out, but he was well ahead of anybody else at that level in his career. I could count on him for great matches against a variety of opponents. His size was not an issue in Memphis, but I thought his size would prevent him from ever being a star in WWE. I thought this not because of his level of talent, but because, at that time, Vince did not feature smaller wrestlers in main event programs. I

never expected that to change. If you don't know, the American Dragon became Daniel Bryan. He has become one of the most popular wrestlers in history. He clicked with the fans and almost 20 years later is a big star all over the world.

The American Dragon was a member of a faction called "Clique 2000." That group also included Spanky, Lance Cade, and Shooter Schultz. Spanky had a long career as well and was featured on RAW not long ago, working under his real name, Brian Kendrick, before becoming an important part of the WWE 205 Live roster. We had dozens of developmental talent come through at that time including a repackaged Steve Bradley, the Dupps Brothers, the Mean Street Posse (Rodney, Pete Gas, and Joey Abs), K-Kwik, Scott Vick, Just Joe, Jason Sensation, the Haas Brothers and more. We also had a great women's roster that included The Kat (Stacy Carter), Victoria, Molly Holly and others. Lance Cade was a tremendous talent, a big six-foot five-inch guy who was a very good worker. Out of all the talent we had, I predicted he would be the biggest star. He did eventually make it to the WWE main roster, working primarily in a tag team with Trevor Murdoch. He was released in 2008 and he passed away in 2010 at age 29. He became another sad wrestler story.

The WWE was on fire during this time, doing record business and ratings. Meanwhile, their competition, WCW, was crashing. It was beneficial for us to get any rub from WWE that we could get. We knew it would be nearly impossible to get any main roster stars to appear on our television show, but it *was* possible to get videos from the stars. They did that for us and even had Mick Foley send interviews in as the commissioner for WWE. Stone Cold Steve Austin was the hottest star in the world, and we were able to have a taped interview from him. We also had a video from the second hottest star in the world, The Rock. We had videos from Triple H, Edge, Jim Ross, Debra, and more. All these simple appearances from big stars added to the credibility of Power Pro Wrestling and it also made for great television.

I signed the contract with the WWE in October of 2000. By March, I couldn't have been happier with not only the WWE, but with Memphis Championship Wrestling and with Jerry Lawler, too. I was confident that in April, our agreement with TV-5 would be extended. On March 10, we produced what I thought was a very good television show. Lawler was out of town, so he was not featured on the show. The WWE had sent Jonathan

Coachman to Memphis and I thought he did a great job co-hosting the show. Jim Ross, the Head of Talent Relations, was also in Memphis and he watched the show at his hotel. We featured the WWE guys on the show. Our featured story that day was a mock wedding for Victoria and Bobby Eaton. Bobby was Bill Dundee's son-in-law. In typical soap opera fashion, Bill came out to stop the wedding. This was a great segment. It had nothing to do with wrestling, but everything to do with advancing characters. I left Memphis that day extremely confident in the future of Power Pro. Looking back, I don't think I have ever been so wrong in my entire life. What was really around the corner was the beginning of the end, and I never saw it coming.

CHAPTER 16:

The End of Power Pro Wrestling: April 14, 2001

The beginning of the end of Power Pro Wrestling occurred thousands of miles away, completely unrelated to the company, but it had a horrific effect on our future. The reason it's hard for me to write about this is, still to this day, I don't know exactly what happened. The entire situation didn't make sense then and it still doesn't today. When we lost our WWE relationship before, I knew why. Back then, it was caused by something that happened on my watch and I take full responsibility for it. In this case, I was clueless and blameless.

After the WWE No Way Out 2001 pay-per-view, Jerry Lawler's wife Stacy Carter was fired by the WWE. This was so unexpected. Lawler was not happy at all and he said that if she was fired, he would quit. They would not change their mind and Stacy was fired. Even today, nobody seems to know the answer as to why. Jerry Lawler was going to support his wife, so he walked out and did not appear on the RAW show the day of the incident with Carter and WWE. I was shocked but didn't have a clue that it would trickle down and affect Power Pro in such a negative way. However, I got a phone call that would change everything. I was told that if I continued to book Lawler, the WWE was going to pull their developmental deal. To this day, I am shocked by how bad the Lawler-WWE relationship became strained. I knew the future of Power Pro depended on Lawler and Stacy being a part of the company and the WWE relationship would be a big factor, especially financially, as well. Lawler was more valuable to the television station than our WWE deal was. I still deeply regretted being at odds with Lawler before and I wasn't going to be in that situation again. I decided that if I was going down, I was going down with Lawler, not without him. The first week or two after the falling out between Lawler, Stacy, and WWE didn't affect Power Pro at all because they were not scheduled to be at our television anyway. The third week was a different story as Lawler was scheduled to be back. I called Jim Ross and pleaded my case. I told him that I felt that our television contract wouldn't be renewed

without Lawler. I assured JR that I would not involve Lawler with any of the developmental talent whatsoever. I told him I would send a written format to him before every TV. He agreed with that plan and said that wouldn't be a problem. I then called Lawler and let him know I needed him for television, and I wrote the TV. I had the television station create commercials promoting Lawler's appearance. Lawler did some local media hyping the show. As promised, I didn't have Lawler interacting with any of the developmental talent. I really didn't have to change anything because Lawler's story involved Brandon Baxter, not the WWE developmental guys. I thought we were good. However, the bottom was about to fall out yet again.

Bruce Prichard called me late Friday afternoon and said that Vince McMahon had gotten involved in the situation and had said that if Lawler was on the show, our deal would be over. Bruce said that the decision was final and there was no use in calling JR because Vince had the last say. I pleaded my case, but to no avail. My decision was easy that day. It was Lawler or no Lawler. This time I wasn't going to make the wrong decision. Doing what I thought was the best decision for the good of the company, and the correct decision overall, I went with Lawler. Jerry Lawler *is* Memphis wrestling. I called Lawler and let him know what was going on. Then, I proceeded to find a crew for the next morning. I was in a really big jam. I had about 14 of the WWE guys scheduled. I didn't have enough local talent available to write a show. So, we did the best we could, but I also looked at old video tapes and went with several classic Memphis wrestling moments. I thought it was a pretty good show, but once again we had been rocked by a major change in creative direction.

The first show without the WWE relationship was show #150 and it aired on March 17, 2001. I think it is important to write about Lawler's reaction to all of this. He knew how important the WWE was to us financially and he advised me to continue to work with them and he just wouldn't appear on TV. That was the classy thing to do, but I also thought it was the wrong decision. I wasn't going to do that. I was going with Lawler and I can't state more clearly that it was the correct decision.

I knew the most important thing was securing a new contract with TV-5, as we would be out of business without it. We could survive losing the WWE deal, but we could not survive losing TV. I knew that. The contract would expire on April 14, 2001. I did everything I could to schedule a

meeting with General Manager Bill Applegate, but he never returned my calls. I was getting extremely anxious. In fact, I was flat out scared. Through it all, Corey Maclin told me not to worry. He said his contacts told him we would be renewed. Dave Brown also tried to calm me down. Looking back, I don't think Dave had any discussions with the actual correct person, Bill Applegate, to make him think that. Instead, I think Dave's sources were Corey and the Director of Operations, Creighton Armour.

It was getting close, but I had not given up. We did a couple of more TV shows, including one on April 7h that I would say was okay. Lawler was out of town that week, so I only had a skeleton crew to work with. I used that show to build to the next week's show, so it accomplished what I wanted it to.

Right after the April 7th show went off the air, Creighton Armour asked me to come up to his office. That was not a regular occurrence, but it had happened before. He got right to the point. He said the show would not be renewed and that next week's show would be our last one. Just like that, Power Pro Wrestling was ending. Creighton continued, giving me a bullshit story that it was an insurance and liability issue. He did not mention ratings as an issue. He did not give the lack of the WWE relationship as an issue. He did bring up WCW. Back when we had lost the WWE deal, I mentioned to him that I would try to obtain a similar relationship with WCW. I received a call from Jeff Jarrett, who was working for WCW at the time. Memphis was where he started, and he knew how valuable Memphis could be to developing talent. He told me he was going to talk to Terry Taylor and for me to call Terry. I left Terry several messages but never got a call back. I didn't know until much later, but I found out what happened. Terry told Jeff that Jimmy Hart had told him that I was about to be out of power and that Corey Maclin and someone at the television station were going to start up a new wrestling show. WCW had enough bullshit going on already as they were rapidly going downhill, and they didn't need anything else piled on to deal with. That is why Terry did not call me back and I don't blame him. My theory is I had people who I had paid every week that made a power play against me to get control of the company, using one of the executives of the station to their advantage.

After all that, the new version of the Memphis wrestling program never even did a live show. They did a couple of months' worth of "Best of

Classic Memphis Wrestling" shows but never a live version. Corey called me the night before our last show and said he was going to try and set up with a meeting with the TV station. He explained maybe he could have better luck. He also asked if I would write the television for him. I didn't handle this call very well. After a few minutes of profanity, I hung up.

Weeks later, Jerry Lawler called to check on me. In that conversation, he mentioned Corey had asked him to attend a presentation they were doing for TV-5 and Bill Applegate. Lawler felt that Corey had been promised the time slot and the new live show. Corey was confident going in, but he was soon shocked and devastated when Applegate said that they were remodeling the studio used for wrestling and extending the news studio. There would never be live wrestling again in that studio because it was all merging into one news studio. I will admit that for many, many years I held a grudge against Corey. Hate might be the correct word to use, but I got over it years ago. Corey had been my friend and did a lot of positive things for me throughout the years. I couldn't have had my three years of Power Pro without him. When my mother passed away in 2011, Corey sent me a classy email. I regret not responding to the email as Corey passed away in 2013. He is another sad ending on the list of names that worked for Power Pro during its tenure.

I can't tell you my mindset during this time. Running my own wrestling company had been my dream, and now it was all over. Wrestling was the only job I ever had. How would I eat or support myself? I was mad, sad, hurt and scared…all at once. I was not looking forward to April 14th and seeing the credits roll on something I had put so much work into building. I had reservations about even going to the show but make no mistake about it: I was going.

Days later, on April 14, 2001, the last episode of Power Pro aired. My life-long dream was over. I felt angry. I felt scared. I felt betrayed. I would be forty years old that year and I had no clue what would come next in my life. After the show ended and the ring was being taken down for what would be the final time, I glanced back in the studio and saw what was happening, and I mean I really *saw* it. Everything came together and hit me all at once. I felt violent, if not worse. I was in the biggest rage of my life. I grabbed a metal pole and I was headed towards the studio. I was not thinking straight, so what I was about to do, nobody knows for sure, certainly not me. I was ten feet from the studio door, mad as I'd ever been,

with a metal pole in my hand. Suddenly, a Memphis police car pulled up, which only made me madder. I thought someone had called the police on me. I glared at the police officer, who was obviously a wrestling fan, and he said, “Randy Hales, what are you doing with that damn pole?” That damn cop was here to save the day and I needed saving to prevent myself from going to jail. I said, “I am always working, we are rehearsing a deal for the wrestling show where I am going to attack someone with a pole.” He laughed and said he would like to see that. I couldn’t have a cop watch me attack someone. Brandon made the save and said we should wait until later to tape that. Brandon then told me it was time to go. We drove off with the policeman still hanging around. Brandon drove back to Jonesboro. I had a lot of thinking to do. Not only did I have to think about what to do with the rest of my life, after wrestling, but I was going to fully examine my life up to that point.

CHAPTER 17:

From Memphis to WrestleMania: The Legacy of Memphis Wrestling

I did not sleep at all last night. When the idea for this chapter came to mind, I thought it would be a piece of cake…but it wasn't. The problem is, there is so much, over five decades of history, and it's nearly impossible to sum up the legacy of Memphis wrestling into a single sentence. Instead, I will talk about specific things. The legacy of Memphis wrestling is that for five decades, it connected with all generations from babies all the way to fans that lived to be 100 years old who still would not ever miss out on watching Memphis wrestling. Memphis became as much a part of the culture of Memphis as music. Memphis wrestling created memories shared by entire families, entire neighborhoods and the entire community. Even though it has been 20 years since there has been a full-time local wrestling company, the memories are still there. Many times, I had either Lance Russell or Dave Brown read a voice over and what they said still is true today. In fact, our Power Pro intro, "Memphis, Tennessee…known world-wide for the beautiful sites of the Mississippi River, for being the birthplace of the blues and for being the home of the King of Rock and Roll, Elvis Presley." Memphis is also known as the professional wrestling capital of the world, certainly the best wrestling city in the country. Other cities have great wrestling traditions, but no other city embraced their wrestling like Memphis did.

I wrote this book from a unique perspective. I wrote this book as an announcer, promoter, booker, General Manager and owner. I also write this book with memories of being a ten-year-old fan hooked on wrestling. Briefly, I am going to share some memories I have as a child. I don't remember my first day of school. I don't remember my first date. I don't even remember the first time I ever went to church. However, I do remember my first memories of Memphis wrestling. I remember The Interns destroying two young wrestlers with one of the wrestlers being injured. The other wrestler, who later became the very successful Kevin Sullivan, was going to face both Interns by himself. But veteran wrestler Lynn Rossi was not going to let that happen, so he came to the ring to team

with Sullivan. In an upset, they won the Southern Tag Championship. I remember the first time my parents took me to the Jonesboro live event matches. The main event was Ron and Terrance Garvin against Eddie and Thomas Marlin. The match was so wild and crazy, it scared me to death! They fought outside the ring by my seats. It scared me so much that I even cried. I remember, after years watching, I missed a studio wrestling television show and I was so mad. One time, we had missed so much school because of snow that we were going to have to go to school on a Saturday and I was going to have to miss wrestling. I didn't want to go to school, but my mother made me. During lunch, we talked our teacher into turning on channel 13 so we could watch wrestling. I remember that Jerry Lawler dressed up like a woman and attacked Jerry Jarrett and Jackie Fargo. I cried, in fact, we all cried. In another chapter I wrote about when Al Greene talked Jackie Fargo into a hair match by talking about Jackie's deceased father. I cried then, too. I remember Lance Russell announcing one Saturday morning that Lawler's manager Sam Bass was killed in a car crash. Lance said he was going to ring the bell one final time for Sam. Again, I cried. This entire book is about me telling the story of living my dream. I'm not going to try and fool you: everybody in my class had the same dream at one time or another. Not to be an NBA player, or an NFL player or an MLB player, they also had the dream to be a wrestler or to be in the wrestling business. Memphis wrestling had the ability to take a young boy, a young girl, a young man or an old man and make them laugh or make them cry. It could make them feel on the deepest level, both happiness and fury. We *believed*. Even when other wrestling products started to get silly, we still believed in Memphis wrestling. That is the legacy of Memphis wrestling.

As I got older and learned more about the inside workings of the wrestling business, there was nothing I wouldn't do to protect the business I loved. As I've said before, I was obsessed. I have two quick examples of that. I was a junior in high school and was in a theater arts class and for some reason, the teacher had walked out of the class. By then, I was already the ring announcer every Saturday at the weekly matches. Everyone knew that. On this day, a bunch of bullies started screwing with me over wrestling. Not only did they say it was all fake, but they were trying to get me to admit it, too. I refused. I had watched several wrestlers get into fights when someone called them a fake. Finally, a couple of guys grabbed me,

put my hand on the table, grabbed a box cutter and said they were going to cut my hand off. I did not cry. I told them to fuck off. That's the moment when I really became a wrestling guy. In my mind, I was willing to sacrifice my hand to protect the business. They were bluffing, and thankfully they let me go. Needless to say, they never used the word fake around me ever again. I am proud of that story.

I am not so proud of the next story. It was the mid-eighties and I was living in Memphis and involved in the booking. Even still, I would go home to Jonesboro on Saturday nights and go to church with my mother on Sunday morning. One particular Saturday, I was involved on television as part of the story. Week after week, Eddie Gilbert had started throwing fire at people and that week, it was my turn. I will be honest, fire in the face hurts. Of course, it is hot, but it doesn't scar and leaves no permanent damage. It looks great on television. At the time, everybody watched wrestling, even church people. I knew people at church would have watched me get fire thrown in my face. I should've stayed home that day, but I decided to go to church. I woke up early and put a bunch of make up on my face. I wouldn't even expose the business in church. I am sure I have been punished for that, many times over. That's the legacy of Memphis wrestling.

In this book, I go over a list of guys who are now members of the WWE Hall of Fame. There are so many people who started their careers in Memphis. Starting with Hulk Hogan, the list is a "Who's Who" of wrestling. WrestleMania has become the showcase event for pro wrestling. The first Mania occurred on March 31, 1985. The list of wrestlers who either started in Memphis or got their first break in Memphis who have main evented on the grandest stage of them all includes Hogan, Undertaker, Steve Austin, Mick Foley, Daniel Bryan, Sting, Ultimate Warrior, Rick Rude, Randy Savage, and the Rock. That is a legacy and an all-star lineup.

Earlier in this book I told the story of when Jim Ross called us up in 1996 with the news that he was sending Dewayne Johnson to Memphis to get experience with the unusual name of Flex Kavana. Dewayne's stint with us was relatively short, but I'm glad I took my chances and that we were able to help him develop. When Dewayne was called up to the main roster of WWE, he had a few months of struggling as a babyface as Rocky Maivia, before eventually turning heel and becoming The Rock, one of the biggest stars ever in wrestling, and then on to earning fame as a box office sensation in Hollywood. Flash forward to April 1, 2013. I had been out of

the wrestling business for about 11 years. It had been over 15 years since I had seen the Rock, when he appeared at one of our early big Power Pro shows at the Mid-South Coliseum. I was traveling for my job and I was in Washington, DC. When I woke up that Monday morning, I read where Monday Night RAW was going to be in town that night. This was the go home show for WrestleMania. I had not seen Jerry Lawler in several years, so I gave him a call and he invited me to come to his hotel and go to RAW with him. We parked in the wrestler parking area, which was in the basement. We started the long walk through the hallways headed into the arena. I saw we were being approached by a bunch of big men. When they were just about on top of us, I realized that stuck in the middle of a bunch of bodyguards was none other than Dewayne Johnson, far evolved from his time as Flex Kavana in Memphis. As he passed Lawler, they spoke. He was now a massive movie star and I knew there would be no way he would remember me. I said hi, he nodded, and I kept walking. I walked several steps and I guess it came to him. He was not expecting to see me in Washington, DC. He yelled out my name and had the biggest smile on his face. He gave me a huge hug and asked why I was there. Then, Dewayne Johnson's facial expression changed. He looked mad. He said I owed him $50. He said he deserved more on the last Memphis payoff he received, which was 15 years before. I was shocked, and Lawler was shocked. So, I grabbed $50 from my wallet, handed it to him and said, there you go! He laughed, then kissed the money, gave it back to me, and said if not for those days, he wouldn't be where he is today. He hugged me, and off he went. That is the legacy of Memphis wrestling.

CHAPTER 18:

Life After Wrestling

I feel that most, but not all, of the people that read this book are wrestling fans. People from all over the world now love to learn about the history of wrestling. I have tried to give a brief history of Memphis wrestling and a very detailed history of Memphis Power Pro Wrestling. This book is my experience opening, running and then closing the company. It is also about a guy with a dream, who exceeded the dream and by a combination of bad decisions, bad luck, and betrayal, lost it all. I think most people can relate to that story, wrestling fans or not. I don't think a person has to have ever heard of me to enjoy this book. The story is one that I think anybody can relate to.

So far, you should know all you ever wanted to know about Power Pro Wrestling. Now I'd like to share a look at my life after and outside of wrestling. First, I wanted to write some about who I am, where I came from, and where I wanted to go. I was born December 10, 1961 in Jonesboro, Arkansas to Harroll and Margaret Hales. I always joked with my mother saying I was a mistake baby but the best mistake they ever made. When I was born, they had a daughter who was 18 years old and was about to get married. She has three daughters who are just a little bit older than me who are more like my sisters than my nieces. They have never called me Uncle Randy in their life, but their kids call me Uncle Buh or just Buh. My middle name is my mother's maiden name, Benton. I wanted my niece Ami's first child to call me Benton as a tribute to my grandmother, Ruth Benton. Corban got Buh out of Benton. Most of the kids now think they are too old to call me Buh. Besides Ami, who is the youngest of my sister Judy's kids, I have Cyndi, and Traci. Traci was born on my third birthday. The other kids are Jake, Caanan, Will and Cal. I think it's pretty cool that Cal was born on my 44th birthday.

Growing up, I remember having a lot of neighborhood friends. In high school and college, I wasn't ever that close to many people at all. The reason for this was the wrestling bug had already bitten me and that is all I

cared about, especially on the weekends. Even though I had other interests, I wouldn't have been poplar even if I was hanging out with the kids. I was skinny, goofy looking, and socially awkward. Most of my school mates would not give me the time of day and I don't blame them. Eventually, the wrestling business changed me. I was forced to get control of my social awkwardness and shyness. I wanted to get involved in wrestling, so I forced myself to talk in public by becoming the weekly ring announcer in Jonesboro. Here was a kid too scared to talk in front of 20 people in a class but I had no fear in talking in front of a crowd of 1,500 wrestling fans. I had to communicate with the fans. I had to communicate with the wrestlers, who I thought were big television stars. I quickly got out of my shell. I learned how to deal with all kinds of different people. Being on television was also a situation where I forced myself to come out of my shell. The only high school reunion I attended was our thirty-year reunion in 2010. By that point, I was confident. I was comfortable in who I had become. I had stories…boy did I have stories. Most of my classmates had seen me on television. They wanted to hear about my career. By that time, I knew how to get over with a crowd and I knew how to command a room. I had a great time, and, in a strange way, I enjoyed showing myself off. I don't mean that in a bad way. I wanted them to think, "man he has changed, and he is cool!"

I wanted to take a moment to talk about a few of my friends. Ricky Knuckles lived right across the street from me. I was hooked on wrestling by then and in our neighborhood, the guys wrestled all the time. Ricky was younger than me and heavier, but much shorter. I studied wrestling, so I was pretty good. Ricky was a challenge. However, today I swear that I won more than I lost. Ricky is doing great as a football coach in Memphis. Another guy that I remember is Jon Wilbanks. He lived down the street from me. Jon is one of the few people that I can remember went from first grade all the way through college with me. I had not seen Jon very much since school, but he and his wife, Kim, came by and had dinner with me on Beale. We have been Facebook friends for years. Jon owns Master Printing in Jonesboro. He has been a great advisor for this book, and I don't think I could have done this without him. I would write a few chapters and then email them to Jon. His feedback was encouraging and made me think I really could do this. Another person I would like to mention is Candi Keller and I want to admit something here. I bet that since the third grade I always thought she was the prettiest gal in the school. I still do. Candi and I

communicated a lot in 2011. We were both going through the same thing as both of us had our mothers living with us and were both caregivers. I know she helped me, and I hope she feels the same. She was at our class reunion in 2010. She made her grand entrance and she could still turn every head in the room. Finally, I'd like to give a shout out to Bubba Carter. Bubba was the top athlete in the school. He played football for the University of Arkansas. Most of all, he always treated me good and didn't think that he was better than anybody when, in reality he was better than any guy in the school. I have told Bubba many times that out of everybody I grew up with, he was the guy that would have been a natural at pro wrestling. He had the personality and would have been a huge star. Currently, his claim to fame is he is a high school teacher, football coach and track coach. He is also a great father. Bubba, you did good, pally.

There is one thing in my life that I loved even more than the wrestling business. I was and am a mama's boy and I'm proud of it. My parents were older, but they were both great. I owe them for any success or any good I have done in my life. I grew up right and my parents were great. I can honestly say I never saw my parents argue, not one time. They both told me they did from time to time but never in public and never in front of their kids. My dad passed away in 1981. My mother and I were always close, but the bond got stronger. I lived at home with my mother and grandmother until 1986. I graduated from Arkansas State University in Jonesboro with the Class of 1984. For a couple of years after that, I was on the road four or five days a week with the wrestling company, but I still lived in Jonesboro. Finally, in 1986, I moved to Memphis and then to Nashville later that same year. It was hard to leave home, but my mother wanted me to live my life and she needed to live hers. She remarried in 1989 and moved to Monticello, Mississippi. She started getting dementia in probably in 2006 I visited from time to time, she came to Jonesboro several times a year, and I called her every day. By 2008, her husband Eutha could not take care of her and was going to put her in the nursing home. At that time, I wasn't going to let that happen. I was living in Poplar Bluff, Missouri at the time so in 2009 I went to Monticello and picked her up and moved her in with me. It was the hardest, most challenging, and most emotional time of my life. We are talking about the best person I have ever known, my mother. It was also the most worthwhile thing that I have ever done. Life comes full circle. When I was a baby, she took care of me. When she was older, I took care of

her and did a lot of the same things for her that she did for me as a baby. For a couple of years, I was watching her die. She passed away August 3, 2011 at age 89, several months before I turned 50. My family and friends were worried about me. I lost my favorite person in my life. It was hard, but I did OK. I had no regrets. I was there for the end of her life and was proud of that. Personally, I had lost several significant people in my life. I lost my uncle and aunt, Luther and Nellie Page. I lost my dad. Then, it was my grandmother Ruth Benton, who I called Nanny. After that, it was my mother. The last person I lost was my great brother-in-law Bill Wyse, who was like a father figure to me. The hardest part of getting older is you continue to lose people close to you.

In the last chapter, you read about the end of the wrestling stage of life. My dream all my life had ended. I needed to figure out what I was going to do with the rest of my life. I had no clue. I was a wrestling guy. Wrestling promoter Jerry Jarrett once told me that if you can be successful in the wrestling business, you can be successful in anything. He thought it was really simple. In any job, if you out work everybody and deal with people honestly, you will be successful. But I still didn't know what was next for me. This is strange, but what was next came from complete opposites in my life. The person who was about to change my life was Rick Davidson. I grew up going to First Christian Church. Rick, who was younger than me, also grew up in that church. I went decades without seeing him. I grew up and married the wrestling business. He grew up and married Karen Benson, whose brother Dallas happened to be one of my classmates in the Jonesboro High School Class of 1980. Rick and Karen had two sons, Will and Troy. By this time, with my sister and brother-in- law, I was attending Christian Valley Christian Church in Jonesboro. Rick and his family were not involved in church, but they were wrestling fans and watched both WWE and Power Pro Wrestling. Out of the blue one day, he called me at home. This was probably early 2000. The WWE was coming to Memphis and they wanted to go. It was sold out and he was desperate. So, he called and asked if I had connections. He didn't want to get free tickets but wanted to know if I could get some for him to buy. I was able to do that. We started talking often and he mentioned wanting to get back in church. By that point I was teaching a Sunday school class and leading the youth group, so I invited him to my church, and they ended up becoming members. In the meantime, I found out Rick was not only the manager of Sonic Drive-In, but he was a

partner. His father-in-law, Don Benson, was the franchisee and owned multiple Sonic locations. I would see them every Sunday at church and we started going to lunch afterwards. He observed how hard I worked and how dedicated I was. Even though most of my time was consumed with wrestling, we became really tight. I had told him about the end of Power Pro Wrestling. I was depressed. The wrestling business was the only job I had ever had in my entire life and I didn't know what to do next. I was depressed and I was scared. Rick eventually asked me if I would consider Sonic. He said there would be an immediate opportunity to become Assistant Manager and there would be opportunities to have my own store and eventually become a partner. Knowing my background of being on television, being a so-called local celebrity, he was almost hesitant to ask me. I did not have any other options and I said I would try it. I ended up working for Sonic for a dozen years, became a store manager, moved to Poplar Bluff, MO, became a partner in two stores, became close to his entire family, and made more money than I ever did in wrestling. Hard work did pay off and this was one of the happiest times of my life. Rick and Karen eventually got divorced and he left Sonic, but I stayed several years longer. I can't tell you how close I got to this family. Karen and I are still close today. I love her boys and I think they are crazy about me. Karen's sister Laura and her husband Lance were close friends and we worked together very closely. I also became very close with Karen's brother Dallas, my old classmate. Don and his wife Lila were also great to me and I spent many a 4th of July, Super Bowl Party's and even Christmas at their homes. I am said to say that Don passed away in 2018. It was sad, but I was glad to see the family at the funeral. During the hardest period of my life, this family was there for me. When I lost my dream and my company, they gave me a new career. When my mother got sick and moved in with me, they were there. I could not work as much, and they didn't say one word. They were great, and I will love all of them as long as I live. However, the relationship would come to an end, at least for a while. With some of them, the relationship is still strained, and it was all my fault. I am not going into full details, but here is the short version. I was sad and depressed when my mother died. I had lived in Poplar Bluff for 11 years. I was making money, doing a good job and was very happy. After she died, I was not myself and wanted to make a change to move back to Jonesboro. If that didn't happen, I would probably still be with them today. They made some changes and

moved me back to Jonesboro and I took over the Sonic on Johnson, which was the slowest volume store in town. I did a horrible job and made some bad decisions. Does that sound familiar? I was looking for a big change in my life and needed a new challenge. I am sure they felt betrayed. I regret this time but did not regret what comes next. I also do not regret what I am doing now, at least not most of the time. I am so blessed that I had the Sonic period of my life and I love The Benson Family. I am sorry about the past. Thanks for everything you have done for me.

The next step in my working life happened because of a relationship with a hero, a friend and a wrestling businessperson. I have a lot of wrestling friends, but there is no doubt that the person I have been the closest to for the longest period is Superstar Bill Dundee. I could write a book about Bill. Oh, that's right, I did write a book about Bill. I did not want writing credit, but I did in fact help Bill write his story. If you want to read about Bill's remarkable life, read "The Bill Dundee Story: If You Don't Want the Answer, Don't Ask the Question. " I talked to Bill all the time and he was also telling me that I would do a great job for the company he was working for. Bill was a traveling Marketing Director for Cole Brother's Circus, the oldest traveling tent Circus in the world. The season was about nine months long and the tour hit the Mid-Atlantic states, the Washington DC area, the East Coast and finished the season down south in Florida. Ron West, a long-time wrestling referee and promoter, was the first wrestling guy to do this and was successful. Bill did the job for several years. Bill was always telling me I would love the job; I would be able to see parts of the country I had never visited and make real good money. I would also just have to work nine months and be off for three. It was the closest thing to the wrestling business I have ever done, and I had a great three-year run. I thank Renee Story, Elvin Bale and John Pugh for giving me this chance. It was fun, and I had success. Instead of promoting wrestling, I promoted the circus I am so happy that I did this. It was so great. I loved seeing Washington DC, New York City, New Orleans and so many other places I had never visited. I especially enjoyed the beaches. I spent a lot of off time at the beach. I also made new friends. But, for the second time in my life, I saw a business that I love change. Due to a lot of factors, which included owners that refused to keep up with the times and Animal Right activists that protest the circus, it became hard for the circus to be successful. My last year with the circus was 2015. It was bad and the

season ended with the circus owing me over $5,000. I was promised they would pay me the money owed but that never happened. They never had a 2016 season.

When season 2015 ended, it was time to go back home but I had been invited by Bill Dundee and Donna to come stay with them. I am afraid if it wasn't for them, I would have ended up living under a bridge. I will never forget that. I went months not giving up. I was told I would get my money that was due, and I was promised that they would do a 2016 season. Neither ever happened. Again, I was out of a job I had to start over.

The next stage of my working life came from another friend and hero. I received a call from Jerry Lawler, who knew of my Sonic experience. The King, along with his business partner Barry Aycock, was going to open King Jerry Lawler's Hall of Fame Bar and Grille on historic Beale Street in Memphis. It was going to be a wrestling bar. It was a perfect fit. I started as Director of Operations and it turned into not only that job but the General Manager position as well. I liked the restaurant business. I could learn the bar business and of course, I felt they had to have a Memphis wrestling person at the bar, and it helped that I was a Jerry Lawler person, too. It was a perfect fit and I feel it was meant to be.

CHAPTER 19:

The Death of Brian Christopher Lawler

Even though I have discussed Brian Christopher Lawler throughout the book, I think I need to go back and discuss BC in more detail. I remember the first time I ever saw Brian. He was ten years old and I was 20. I had just started going to the Mid-South Coliseum every Monday night to be along ringside with Lance Russell, serving as ring announcer for several matches each week. Lance would normally always announce the main event and we would alternate the rest of the matches. Lance and I would always walk out to ringside together and we would start the show by playing the National Anthem. I remember one week in 1981, Lance and I walked out to the ring and a young kid started yelling at us. He was loud and showed a lot of personality. He was requesting the microphone and he wanted to do a promo. I quickly realized that this young man was Jerry Lawler's oldest son. I remember Lance and I laughing and talking about how one of these days, that young man would be a star. That young man was Brian Lawler and we were right, he would become a star.

Brian and his younger brother Kevin would have front row seats, right behind the announce table, every Monday night for years. The more I got to know Brian, the more I knew he would become a wrestling star. My career continued to evolve. I went from a young announcer to one of the key people in the wrestling office. I finally became full time and ended up as a key person in the office. Brian continued to grow up, played football in high school, became a great athlete, and continued to work out daily and grow his body. I talked earlier about the time in 1989 when I left due to frustrations with the business. I thought I was done for good, but I came back in 1993 and ended up once again becoming the booker. This was a time when Jerry Jarrett, Jerry Lawler and Jeff Jarret were already in WWE. I became the booker in 1994 and Brian Lawler was one of my top stars.

You can read everything you can read about Brian. You will read about the good days and you will read about the bad days. I was not around Brian very often in the bad days. I am blessed that almost all my memories of Brian are good. I loved both Brian the human being as well as Brian the

wrestling star. If the national wrestling expansion wouldn't have happened, Brian would have been seen in the same lite as Sputnik, Fargo, Dundee and his dad. He had that much talent. I knew Brian since he was ten, I was the booker for years, I have made many road trips with him, and I can tell you right here that Brian and I never had a cross word. Never.

I have already discussed my issues on the road where I made some very bad decisions. I am very lucky that I am alive today to discuss them. Brian was a different story. Brian was like his dad, in that he never drank, did drugs, and never was in any trouble early in his life. Later, Brian changed. This is not easy to write. Brian finally got his dream job. He was signed to the WWE in the most successful period in the history of wrestling, the Attitude Era. Brian became a big world-wide star and he was making a ton of money. It ended up being a situation where I think he made too much money too young and he started hanging out with the wrong people. Brian started making decisions that caused him to lose everything. He lost his job, his money, his wife, his relationship with his son, his home, and everything important to him. He had bad alcohol and drug issues and became an addict. It was very sad. His career was never the same, but he never lost his personality. He was fun, charming and had a good heart. Those close to him tried everything they could to get him help and they continued trying to the end. Even at his worst, Brian was well liked and could own a room. The minute he walked in the room he would become the center of attention. Everyone gravitated to Brian.

I would pray for Brian every night and never gave up hope that he would get the help he needed and would be well again and would be successful again. Brian had been arrested several times. He had also been admitted into rehab several times. In July, Brian was arrested in Bolivar, TN. for DUI 3. He was taken to the county jail. The sheriff told Jerry Lawler that he would take care of Brian and that Lawler bailing him out of jail would not help Brian. He said they would make sure Brian would get the help he needed and that they would save his life. He convinced everyone that Brian's only chance to live was to stay in jail and get help. Jerry had bailed Brian out many times and was worried that Brian would end up hurting himself or somebody else, so he agreed to let the sheriff help him and he never gave up hope that we would get the Brian back we all knew and loved.

July 28, 2018 started as a normal Saturday for me at King Jerry Lawler's Hall of Fame Bar and Grille. It was a very busy Saturday. I normally do not answer my phone when we are busy, but Kevin Lawler kept trying to call me, so I answered. Kevin then told me the bad news. There had been an issue at the jail where Brian was still in custody and he had been flown to the Med in Memphis and was in bad shape and it did not look good. Jerry Lawler was out of town in North Carolina and I called him right away. Jerry told me that he was going to take the earliest flight possible the next morning to return to Memphis and I told him that I would get to the hospital as soon as I could. As I walked into the emergency room, I still had hope. What I saw scared me and took away most of my hope, but it didn't take away my prayers as I prayed harder than I ever had in my life. Jerry arrived at the hospital Sunday morning around 11am. I had stayed all night and would stay to the end. There were a lot of prayers, a lot of tears, and a lot of funny Brian stories. We all hoped for the best, but Brian passed away at 3:45pm Sunday afternoon, July 29, surrounded by family, personal friends and his wrestling family. A piece of everybody that loved Brian died that afternoon. It was so hard standing in the same room as Jerry, watching my idol, my hero, and my friend watch his son die. I felt bad for everyone, including Brian's brother Kevin.

Brian's funeral was not a typical funeral. It was a wrestler's funeral. It was a celebration of the fun life of Brian Christopher Lawler. This was a case of a man that left us far too young, who left a strong legacy and left behind so many fans, friends and family that loved him. There are also a lot of unanswered questions on how this happened. I think that in due time, we will get our answers. My thoughts and prayers are with everybody who was close to Brian, but especially to Kay, Kevin and Brian. I want everybody to know, I loved Brian Lawler and am blessed he was a part of my life for so many years.

CHAPTER 20:

The Death of Eddie Marlin

Lance Russell is known for many memorable calls on Championship Wrestling. When Lance, in a frustrated and urgent manner said, “Eddie Marlin, we need some help out here!!”, we knew the one-man cavalry of Eddie Marlin was on his way and business was about to pick up! I have written a lot about Eddie Marlin in this book, but if anybody deserves a chapter on their own, it’s Eddie Marlin. I have had a career in professional wrestling that has allowed me the opportunity to write a book about these experiences. Without Eddie Marlin, there would be no Randy Hales in the wrestling business. From a personal life standpoint, there have been several times that without Eddie Marlin, I would be homeless or maybe even dead. Lance would always call on Eddie to restore order to a chaotic scene in Memphis wrestling, and thousands of times, he was always there to help. Everybody in their lives has a person they count on to be their lifeline. Mine was Eddie Marlin, and that is why this book is dedicated to him. In my own life, whenever I would say “Eddie, I need some help!”, for over 45 years, he always answered that call.

Eddie was born on August 13, 1930, in Nashville, Tennessee, to Eddie and Anna May Marlin. Eddie had one brother, Thomas, and two sisters, Anna and Peggy. On June 22, 1949, Eddie married Norma. They were married for 65 years. They had two daughters, Deborah and Diane. Eddie learned a valuable lesson about the value of hard work early in his life from his father. Eddie Sr. worked long, hard hours operating his grocery store in Nashville. Eddie started working while still in school by operating a horse and wagon business selling fruit and vegetables. In 1950, Eddie left school so he could concentrate on raising his family. Eddie supported his family by working several jobs, sometimes even working several jobs at the same time. Eddie worked as a cook at Bradly Candy Company, as a painter and bus driver at the Southern Coach Company, as a deputy at the Davidson County Sheriff Department and then for years at Gates Rubber Company. Eddie, a long-time wrestling fan, got the itch to be in the wrestling business in 1952, starting out as a referee before becoming a wrestler. For years, Eddie would work at Gates during the day and then hit the road to wrestle

that night. It was long hours and a lot of miles on the road, but Eddie did what he had to do to support his family. Back when they were younger, Eddie was very protective of his daughters…and that was still the case over 60 years later. Eddie knew how life was for a wrestler on road, so the last thing he wanted was for his daughter to marry a wrestler. I can only imagine Eddie's reaction when Jerry Jarrett came to him one day around 1970 and asked if he could marry Deborah. Even though Eddie knew how life was as a wrestler, he also knew Jerry Jarrett was not a typical wrestler. Jerry was different and Eddie knew that Jerry had a bright future ahead of himself, and not just as a wrestler. Being a man of very few words and often staying calm, Eddie said yes when Jerry asked for his approval to marry Deborah. However, before walking off, Eddie told Jerry that if he ever touched or physically harmed Deborah, he would kill him. Deborah and Jerry have two children together and have been married for almost 50 years. Eddie was just as proud of his youngest daughter, Diane. Diane married Randy West and they have one daughter, Tammy. Diane is in the medical field and she still lives in Hendersonville. Diane came to see Eddie almost every day.

After spending almost twenty years working both at Gates and as a wrestler, Jerry Jarrett came up with an idea. He suggested that Eddie buy the promotional rights to Tupelo, MS and Jonesboro, AR and become a promoter. Jerry knew that in wrestling, the money is being in promotion. In 1972, Eddie retired from Gates and the wrestling business became his full-time job. Eddie knew what his role was in the wrestling business.: do whatever needed to be done. He transported the ring, served as ring announcer, and put out posters over the towns he promoted. Not only did he work in the office, but he also assisted with booking and served as an agent, doing both opening matches and main events. Later, Eddie was the promotion's main on-air spokesman and personality, what fans today would recognize as the authority figure or general manager. The difference in now and then is that the fans trusted Eddie to make the right decisions. He always was presented as a loving, respected grandfather figure that would always make sure the rules of the promotion were followed. Eddie was the voice of reason in the wild, wild west of Memphis wrestling when things got too chaotic. Fans knew when Eddie came out to answer that call for help, he meant business, so the level of trust between Eddie and the fans was always very strong.

I think that because the last twenty years of his career was known for his role of being a promoter, Eddie is greatly overlooked as a wrestler. If you had to write a definition for the term wrestling babyface in the dictionary, Eddie would be a prime example. Eddie was always the underdog, never cocky. He spoke directly to the people and related to the fans as good as anybody I've ever seen. Eddie was my favorite wrestler. As a matter of fact, recently, while doing a wrestling podcast, I was asked who my all-time favorite wrestler was, and I answered Eddie Marlin. Eddie was a very good worker, but not great. He was also a particularly good interview, but not great. As a wrestler who the fans could believe in, trust and support, he was great. Eddie was not only one of the best babyfaces ever in the Tennessee territory, but he was one of the best babyface men I've ever known outside of the wrestling world, as well.

As a wrestler, Eddie had his biggest success working in a tag team. He had big money programs with both Tojo Yamamoto and Tommy Gilbert. I think Eddie and Tommy were one of the best teams in the history of the Memphis territory. They had money drawing feuds with The Interns, Don and Al Green, Jerry Lawler and Jim White, as well as George Barnes and Bill Dundee. Eddie also had main event success teaming with his brother Thomas, Jackie Fargo, Jerry Lawler, Jerry Jarrett, and Tommy Rich. When a wrestler makes their debut as a heel, it is sometimes hard for them to be successful later when they're transitioned info a babyface. That is especially true if the wrestler was extremely nasty and hated as a heel. The only way to do it successfully is to align that heel with a person the people already love. When Bill Dundee was switched to a babyface, his partner was Eddie Marlin. You know the rest of that story as Bill Dundee is one of the most popular mainstays in Memphis wrestling history. The initial credit for that success would have to go to Eddie Marlin.

People say: "Once a wrestler, always a wrestler." Eddie Marlin had been in the wrestling business for over 65 years. I wrote an entire chapter of the legacy of Memphis wrestling. However, this chapter is not about Eddie Marlin's legacy as a wrestler or promoter. Eddie's legacy is about being the best father in the world to his two daughters. His legacy is by being the best grandfather and great grandfather he could be. His legacy is being his son-in-law Jerry Jarrett's closest ally and advisor. His legacy is about being a mentor and lifelong friend to many, especially to me. His greatest legacy is

being the best husband in history to Norma, and by taking care of her through her sickness and eventual death in 2014.

In September of 2018, I didn't know what to do next. I decided to quit as manager of Jerry Lawler's Bar and Grille in Memphis. I was nearly broke. My rent was due that Sunday and I had no clue what I was going to do. I had no job and no hope. Then, Jerry Jarrett called. He asked how I was doing, and I was honest when I told him I wasn't doing well. He had a quick solution: pack your car and go to Eddie's. At age 88, Eddie Marlin still took in friends that had fallen on hard times.

It will be hard to find the right words to finish this chapter. I moved from Memphis to Eddie's on September 20, 2018. As I said, I had quit my job and did not know what to do next. But Jerry Jarrett said Eddie needed somebody to stay with him and that I could get a job in the Nashville area. I did move in with Eddie, but never landed a job. I tried hard at first, but it was not meant to be. However, what was meant to be was it allowed me to be there to look after Eddie Marlin in the next stage of his life.

Norma, the love of Eddie Marlin's life and his wife of 65 years died in 2014. In 2015, he started feeling bad and it was discovered he had advanced COPD. By the time I moved in with Eddie, he was on oxygen 24 hours a day. I would prepare Eddie's meals, help him manage his medicine and we had a great time being together. I was there for him when he needed it, but he was also there for me. When my plans of getting a job in the Nashville area didn't work out, I created a website and started selling Power Pro DVD's. I then started the Memphis Memories Podcast with Sean Reedy, which allowed me to create Facebook and Twitter live video shows among other projects. Here I would talk about the history of Memphis wrestling and interact with the fans that also cared so much about its history. It created the revenue I needed, but my priority was to take care of Eddie,

While living with Eddie, an incredibly sad event happened in my personal life when I lost my sister, Judy. While always being a wonderful sister, Judy and her husband, Bill Wyse, were more like second parents to me. Bill and Judy had 3 daughters, Cyndi, Traci, and Ami. Sadly, Bill passed away on New Year's Eve of 2014. Judy had already been sick for years. As a family, we decided it was best for Judy to move in with her daughter, Traci, in Cape Cod, MA. For the first two years, I was working for Cole Brothers Circus and was able to visit. Judy was also able to fly home for one short visit. At one time or another, me, the three daughters

and all five of her grandchildren were able to visit her. But, after returning to the Cape, she continued to decline. She later fell and broke her back. She then gave up. She lost all desire to live and passed away Thanksgiving weekend of 2018. I was devasted. Eddie was my support system and his strength brought me strength. I made the trip back to Jonesboro to be with my family. I appreciated my old enemy turned buddy Brandon Baxter, who came to the funeral to support me. After the funeral, I headed back to Eddie's, knowing he would help me get through this family crisis.

The year 2019 started better for me and Eddie both. I think Eddie really enjoyed having me with him. We talked about wrestling all the time. I read Eddie excerpts from this manuscript every day. Eddie loved helping me with my website business. He advised on prices, watched me duplicate DVD's, helped package, and always listened to me record my podcast. He even agreed to do a few appearances on the show. He also appeared on Jerry Jarrett's podcast as well. He loved having company. His daughter, Dianne, and her husband, Randy West, visited every weekend. Deborah and Jerry Jarrett had moved to Franklin, TN, but they came weekly, if not more, to visit Eddie. His grandchildren and their families also visited frequently. We also had visits from Bill Dundee, Bobby Eaton, Tony Falk and more. He was feeling better and enjoying life more than he had in years. We were all excited about his improvement and I started encouraging him to go with me to some shows. He was considering it.

We had our usual routine. When Norma was alive, Eddie got in the habit of sleeping in his recliner. He would usually go to sleep around eight every night, if not before. Every morning, I waited until I knew he was awake, then I made the coffee, took him a cup, then fixed breakfast. He was always glad to see me. The first major sign of trouble happened early one morning in late May. Eddie slept a little later than normal. I waited until I heard Eddie, and at 8am, I started the coffee. I got him a cup and walked in and as always loudly said, "HELLO EDDIE MARLIN!!" He looked at me confused and puzzled. He took the cup and stared at me. Finally, in a weaker than normal voice, he asked, "tell me your name." I instantly knew something was bad wrong. He had known me since I was ten. Again, he asked me my name. I was shocked and I told him my name. He laughed, and said "no, you're Randy Dandy Hales." He, and a lot of other people, called me Randy Dandy. After that, he acted normally, but I called both

daughters and we decided I would call his doctor and have him checked out as soon as possible. I was the messenger and we all thought he may argue about going to doctor, but he didn't resist at all. The doctor determined he had a Urinary Tract Infection, which made him feel bad and confused. The doctor called in medicine to his pharmacy and I picked it up. Within a few days, Eddie was back to normal. After that, we went for a few rides in the car and even went to visit Randy and Dianne. They were outside, and Eddie never got out of the car, but we still had a great visit. Over the next week or so, Eddie ate good, rested good, had plenty of family company and was in good spirits. I felt pretty good about this situation and thought we were headed in right direction.

May 11, 2019 started out good. Eddie's grandson came for a visit and gave Eddie a good shave. Eddie's daughter Dianne visited later that day. Eddie was in a great mood and loved when his family visited. While Eddie was still having UTI issues, we had moved a portable toilet into the living area, which allowed him easier access to the bathroom. During the night, he had several accidents, and I cleaned him up. He was sleeping in his recliner, and my bedroom was in the back of the house. I left my door open so I would hear if he called for me. He called for me about every thirty minutes. I knew then that we were having a set back and planned to call the doctor that morning. Around 5:30 AM, Eddie yelled for me again. I ran to him and found him on the floor. He had slipped out of his chair, which had happened before. In the past, I was able to get him back in the chair. This time, I couldn't lift him. I called his son-in-law, Randy West, who was retired from a construction company and lived a few blocks away. Randy rushed over and we got Eddie to his chair. We both thought he looked bad. Randy called Dianne and I called Deborah. I also called 911, and they arrived quickly. He was rushed to the Hendersonville Hospital. His oxygen level and blood count were both very low. He was immediately transferred to the ICU. Randy was there with me and Deborah, and Jerry and Dianne got there as quick as possible. We thought we might lose him that night, but he survived. Fearing the worst, Jerry stayed there overnight, but thankfully, Eddie came through.

The next few weeks are almost a blur. After a week, he was transferred to the physical rehab facility in Gallatin. His daughters, sons-in-law and grandchildren visited every day. I would stay during the day then go to Eddie's house at night, which started a process of going back and forth from

the rehab center to the Gallatin Hospital. We had several close calls. Back when Eddie's wife was very sick, she ended up having to receive dialysis treatments and actually passed away while having a treatment. Throughout that process, Eddie saw how hard it was on her. Eddie always said he never wanted to go through dialysis. However, his family and the doctors changed his mind. He took it every few days, always saying he would give it a few times. This went on for weeks.

Eddie was at the rehab facility on August 9, 2019 and I was scheduled to take him to get dialysis in Hendersonville at 11am. However, Eddie's levels were so bad at rehab that they called an ambulance and transported him back to Hendersonville hospital. He was put back in ICU. At this point, Eddie was tired of fighting and refused to do any more dialysis. This is when the doctors came to all of us and suggested hospice. Eddie's 89^{tth} birthday was on August 13 and he was moved to the hospice area of the hospital. Jason and I stayed Tuesday night, and then I stayed until about ten Wednesday night when Jason returned to let me go home. The rest of the family spent most of the day beside Eddie as well. One interesting story is that earlier in the day, Jerry and I went back to Eddie's to pick something up. Later, Deborah told me that Eddie, who was sleeping most of the time, woke up and asked for Jerry. When Deborah told Eddie that Jerry was gone, Eddie told her he was tired, but he was worried about what would happen to me. She assured him they would all make sure I was fine. In his last hours, Eddie was concerned about me. This is so special to me and I'm crying as I type these words.

While his grandson slept, Eddie Marlin passed away at 5:00am August 15, 2019. One of the most important men in my personal life and the most important person in my wrestling life departed this world to be with his beloved wife, Norma. After Eddie passed away, the next few days are a blur. His visitation was on August 16 with family, friends, tons of fans, and members of the wrestling business such as, Jeff Jarrett, Doug Gilbert, Tommy Rich, Michael Saint John and more. The funeral was beautiful and was attended by family, friends, fans, Dave Brown, Tony and LT Falk, referee Joe Wheeler, George Gulas and other members of Eddie's wrestling family. I was proud to be alongside both Eddie's blood family as well as his wrestling family at both services to celebrate his legacy and how much he meant to me.

Eddie Marlin was the best man I have ever met in my life, period…not just in the wrestling aspect. He was a part of my life for more years than my own father was. I would not have had the opportunity to live my dream without Eddie Marlin. I would not be writing this book without Eddie Marlin. I would not be the man I am today without Eddie Marlin. Eddie, I will never forget you.

CHAPTER 21:

Ramblin’ Fever: Making Towns, Making Memories

I recently posted a little teaser about this book project on my Facebook account. I received a question from my longtime friend, Bill Dundee’s biggest fan, and all-around great person, Gail Brooks. Gail is lovingly known to the wrestling community as “Crazy Gail.” She wanted to know if she made the book, and I had to tell her that she wasn’t in my original manuscript. That got me to thinking about how I’ve written over twenty chapters, thousands of words, and have talked about a bunch of people. Even though I’ve talked about a ton of wrestlers, there are so many I didn’t cover. Even though I will probably forget a few people, I am going to use the next several pages to talk about some of them that helped me live this dream so you can learn more about them, the lives we lived, and the music that influenced us while on the road. These friends became family along the way and were so important to me throughout my years in wrestling. We had so many fun adventures.

First, my favorite part of the business was being on the road. I loved the traveling aspect of the wrestling life, or as it’s called in the business, “making the towns.” If you have never been on the road every day for decades, this may be hard to relate to, as there’s nothing quite like it. We traveled many, many miles and saw so many sights. Most people will have a hard time understanding how we did it or what it was like to go through it.

A big part of surviving the road is the hours we spent listening to music from the radio, tape player or CD player. Here, I am going to use the lyrics from a Merle Haggard song called “Ramblin’ Fever.” This is a perfect song to describe our life on the road.

My hat don't hang on the same nail too long
My ears can't stand to hear the same old song
I don't leave the highway long enough to bog down in the mud
'cause I've got ramblin' fever in my blood

I caught this ramblin' fever long ago
When I first heard a lonesome whistle blow
If someone said I ever gave a damn, the damn sure told you wrong
I've had ramblin' fever all along
Ramblin' fever
The kind that can't be measured by degrees
Ramblin' fever
There ain't no kind of cure for my disease
There's times I'd like to bed down on a sofa
And let some pretty lady rub my back
And spend the early morning drinking coffee
And talkin' about when I'll be coming back
'cause I don't let no woman tie me down
And I'll never get too old to get around
I want to die along the highway and rot away like some old high-line pole
Rest this ramblin' fever in my soul

If you've never heard this song, take a break from this book and listen to it, as it's the best way I can help you relate to what it was like living the wrestling life out on the road.

I did not spend a lot of miles with Jerry Lawler in the car. I liked country music, he didn't. In those days, I liked to drink beer or whisky and smoke dope, he didn't. During most of those days, he lived in Memphis, where I lived in the Nashville area or in Jonesboro. Even still, the two most influential people in not only my wrestling career but also my personal life were Jerry Lawler and Eddie Marlin. You can often count the number of friends who have your back when you are down on one hand, and at the top of my list is Jerry Lawler. He just knew me. I didn't have to call or tell him. Even from thousands of miles away, he could read a Facebook post, know something was wrong and give me a call. He knew the right words to say that would help. If I needed a job, he knew that, and he would take care of it. If it was money I needed, he would send a check. Everybody knows he is the best wrestler that has ever been made. He's the complete package, as he is great at everything: wrestling, cutting promos, booking, and is a very talented artist. The number one thing me and Jerry Lawler had in common was the strong love we had for our mothers. You can always judge a man by how he treats his mother, and Jerry treated his like a queen. He got her a job

selling wrestling tickets at the Mid-South Coliseum and paid her a big salary out of his own pocket. He bought her a car as well as a new house in a safer neighborhood. He was there for her until the end. Jerry Lawler was the King of Sons.

I have had a love-hate relationship with Bill Dundee. When I first met him, I hated him. He was a villain who beat up my favorite wrestlers every week. When he became a babyface, I loved him., because he teamed with my favorite wrestlers. I loved selling pictures of Bill because he sold more than anybody else, which meant in turn I made more money. He also got mad with me at times. I was not his favorite person when I let him go because of the Wolfie D incident. At times, he disagreed with my booking. On the other hand, I probably spent more time on the road with Bill Dundee than I did with anybody. Bill taught me about the business of pro wrestling. He taught me so much about booking. We would drink together, laugh together, and had a lot of fun. I even helped Bill write his book. I picked him up at the hospital and took him to Nashville after he had knee replacement surgery. He has always been good to me. After I left Sonic, he got me a job with Cole Brothers Circus. After that closed, he let me stay with him for months. He was a huge star in Memphis, a great booker in Memphis and later for Bill Watts' Mid-South Wrestling. He broke all attendance records there. I do not know how my life would look without Bill Dundee and I'm thankful that we still talk all the time.

I've written about Randy and Dianne West several times in this book. Dianne was Eddie Marlin's Daughter. Randy came to work for Jarrett Promotions around 1978 as the head of production and live event remote camera operator. When I first started traveling on the road, I stayed a few days on the road with them and their daughter, Tammy. At the time, they lived in a big house next door to Jerry Jarrett on Cumberland Hill Drive, where Randy's office and production studio was located. Dianne loved her daddy and for the year I stayed with Eddie, I saw Dianne at a minimum of five days a week. Randy and I often traveled together and always had a great time. We became extremely close. I remember one trip to Springfield, Tennessee around 1985. It was a short trip, but we left pretty early. Randy was driving a company van. We had just left the house when a teenager lost control of his truck and ran into us. As this was back before cell phones, I walked to a nearby house to use their phone. Jerry Jarrett came to the rescue in his limousine. We took him back home, loaded the equipment in the car,

and made the town on time. I am now back living in Jonesboro, but Randy still checks on me several times a day. He is like a brother to me, Dianne like a sister, and Tammy like a niece. Randy had a great mind for wrestling. I cannot tell you how many great ideas Randy had. He was great at that job and is now my best friend. I love them both and I will never forget how they helped me get back on my feet after Eddie died.

I regret my actions the first time I met Jeff Jarrett. It was probably in the early eighties. By that time, I was announcing in Memphis every Monday night. By this time, I was close to Eddie and thought I knew all about his family. All the building workers at the Arthur Branch Auditorium knew how close I was with Eddie, so at a young age, I was the go-to guy. One night they came to me and said Jerry Jarrett's son was there to see him. I thought Jerry just had one son, Jason, who was still very young. He never made the towns at that age. I went to the box office and saw a blonde-haired kid a few years younger than me. I was not going to let him in and that would have resulted in me getting a lot of heat on myself. The blonde-haired kid explained that his name was Jeff, and that he was Jerry's son by his first wife. I did not believe him. Thankfully, I went and asked Eddie who told me the full story. It turned out that Jeff was in Jonesboro with friends visiting his friend's grandparents. Eventually, we let Jeff and his buddy in the building, and he got to visit with Jerry, and all was good. Jeff started refereeing some in 1985 and began working on the ring crew. We became friends at that point. When Jeff started wrestling, we would travel together every day for the next three or four years. Jerry later wanted Jeff to learn the business part of wrestling, so this resulted in Jeff and I being at the office together all day before traveling to the towns where the shows were being held at. In those days, we were awfully close and had a lot of fun. I remember all kinds of stories with Jeff, but the best three are all-time classics. For this publication, I will try to protect the guilty and clean these stories up a little.

Around 1987, Lawler hired a manager he called Brother Ernest Angel. He was a great manager, but I did not like his gimmick, and I did not like him to be honest. One night, we were at a spot show in Kentucky and I walked over to the heel dressing room. Brother Ernest had a friend with him in the dressing room, and when I walked in, I observed his friend hearing all the inside talk about the business. Keep in mind, during those times, this was something you could be fired over. I quickly kicked the friend out of

dressing room and fired Brother Ernest. What I was unaware of was that the friend was a pilot and had flown Brother Ernest to Kentucky that night. I then went back to the babyface dressing room, still fuming, and told Jeff what had just happened, and that Brother Ernest was fired. Jeff calmly said he thought I had made a mistake. First, Jeff said, Brother Ernest was new to the business and did not know any better. Second, Jeff reminded me Lawler loved Ernest and Jeff said he thought Lawler would get mad at me for firing him. I then went back to the dressing room and saw they were leaving, but I hired him back. What I didn't realize until years later was that Jeff and Referee Frank Morrell had flown on the same plane as Brother Ernest Angel, and if I would have fired the guy, Jeff and Frank would have been stranded! Jeff really saved me on that one.

Incident number two, I will clean up a bit. The year was 1988. We were running Jackson on a Sunday and had decided to spend the night in Memphis that Saturday night to party. We lived in the Nashville area then and normally just spent the night in Memphis on Friday nights as the next morning was the weekly live TV show. We usually didn't act too crazy, especially me and Jeff, since we knew we had to get up early to make it to TV. However, on this night, The Nasty Boys, Brian Knobbs and Jerry Sags rode with us. After getting back to Memphis, Jeff and the Nasty Boys wanted to go to the bar. Jeff was not of legal drinking age yet. They wanted to go to a very popular spot, and I knew there would be tons of female fans there and I was afraid one of them would tell Lawler, who would then tell Jerry Jarrett and I would get heat on myself. I told them to take my car and I would stay at the hotel. However, I had been drinking the entire trip home and I believe Jeff drove. So, they went to the bar, but I was not finished drinking. Earlier, I wrote about longtime fan Gail Brooks, more commonly known as Crazy Gail. That night, Gail, along with her sister, Michelle, knocked on my door. Back then, Gail always called Jeff "Pretty Jeff" and she wanted to know where Pretty Jeff was. I told her that I didn't know. Truthfully, I did know, but I didn't want to take the chance on getting caught. I still wanted to go out to drink and party, so I convinced them to take me to an old dive bar close to the airport, figuring nobody Lawler knew would be caught dead at Hernado's Hideaway. So, we got in Gail's car and headed toward the bar. By the time we arrived, I was completely wasted. I am cleaning up this story some, but hopefully you can use your imagination. Inside the bar, the band was playing, and life was good. I

decided I needed some loving, so I told one of the girls to crawl under the table and take care of business. As you can imagine, at this point in the story, I am happy. Suddenly, the band stopped playing as the lead singer announced that the band needed a break. He then said there was a celebrity in the house sitting at the back wall. I was caught off guard and looked, thinking it might be Jerry Lee Lewis or someone. I quickly realized after looking back that I was at the back wall and that he was talking about me! Talk about ruining the mood. I drank some more, and we headed back to the hotel. One of the girls came back to the room, but at the level of drunkenness I was at, I got mad, yelled and screamed for a while, and threw the girl out into the snow. It had been a crazy night and I ended up going to bed alone, and Jeff was still out with the crew. Our room had two beds, so I took the bed closest to the door and passed out, still fully dressed. At around 4am, Jeff came back to the room and let himself in as he had his own key. I was woken up when Jeff passed out on top of me. I couldn't wake him up, so I had to struggle to get myself out from under him and then crawled into the other bed. The next day at the Coliseum, I learned Brickhouse Brown was in the next room and had overheard me kicking the girl out of our room. Before long, the entire crew knew the story and they all got a big laugh out of it. The story doesn't there, as, years later, Jeff informed me that he had stayed at the bar and let the Nasty Boys borrow my car. They ended up going to another bar, getting to a fight there and were arrested. My car was towed so Jeff had to not only pay to get them out of jail, but he had to pay to get my car back as well before returning to the hotel and passing out. It was a crazy business.

One last story that somewhat involved Jeff, and this just happens to be one of Jerry Lawler's favorite stories. This story cost both me and Lawler money, even though he instigated the entire thing. Frank Morrell was a retired wrestler, with decades of success with many gimmicks, including wrestling under the mask as The Mighty Yankees, Spoiler and The French Angel. I loved Frank and made thousands of trips around the territory with him as well. However, on this trip, Frank rode with Jeff and Scott Steiner and I rode with Bill Dundee. As usual, we were booked in Memphis on Monday night. We probably got home around 3AM. Normally, I would go to office at 10, then leave for Louisville at 2:30 or 3 that afternoon, but this week was different. Either Jerry Jarrett or Christine Jarrett had booked a 10AM sold show in Louisville at the prison and we knew the trip would be

difficult. We knew there were just 8 guys booked on show as they just wanted it to last an hour. We knew the payoff was guaranteed to be good with so few wrestlers on the lineup along with referee Frank Morrell and myself. We also knew Louisville was on Eastern Time, while Nashville was on Central., so we had to leave earlier. Keep in mind we had already gotten in very late the night before and all of us were very tired. As you can imagine, a wrestling show at a prison was crazy, with the bad guys being loved and the good guys being hated, especially young, good-looking guys like Jeff and Scott Steiner. They were verbally harassed, and you can probably imagine the type of things the prisoners were shouting to the babyfaces, especially Jeff. I was scared, and the toughest and meanest guy in our group was Scott, so I didn't leave his side. Thankfully, we got through the show alive and left safely. We then drove to the Louisville Gardens for the show that evening and walked downtown to get something to eat. The matches at The Gardens didn't start until hours later, so we decided to all go to separate rooms to take a nap. I couldn't sleep, so I decided to walk around the arena. I checked the ring and laid down inside the ring hoping to sneak in a nap. Frank, who was also unable to sleep, came down and we talked for a while. We then started walking back to the dressing room, but I stopped to talk to Alvin, the Maintenance Supervisor of the Coliseum. Frank continued walking and was a little ahead of me at that point, but I didn't talk to Alvin long. Frank then yelled, "Let's race!" knowing he had a head start and beat me to the end point. Later that night, I was downstairs in the locker room setting up the matches. Suddenly, I heard Jerry Lawler screaming for me from the top of the stairs. I rushed up there, worried something terrible had happened. When I arrived, I found Jerry, his wife Paula, a few of the other wrestlers, and Frank Morrell standing there. I walked up to Lawler and saw he had a disgusted look on his face, but I had no idea what was wrong. Lawler explained that I should be ashamed of myself for letting an older, not in shape guy in Frank Morrell beat me in a foot race. I defended myself and said Frank had had a head start and that I hadn't even been trying. Lawler called for an immediate rematch and we both agreed. It was going to be official, so Lawler got Louisville Police Officer Mike Patterson to blow the whistle to start the race and Lawler would act as the judge. We were all set and planned to race from one wall to the other wall. We even had an audience as Lawler had called for all the wrestlers to watch. I knew I had to win as my reputation was a stake, but

Frank wanted to win just as bad. The whistle blew and the race started. I led the entire way, but as we reached the finish, I was looking up and Frank was looking down. Because we were coming close to a concrete wall, I started slowing down, which Frank took as me blowing up, so he went into another gear and surged forward to snatch the win. Unfortunately, he ended up crashing into that wall head-first, with a loud and sickening thud. He started to bleed everywhere, and it was a gruesome sight. We all rushed to Frank quickly and learned that, besides being in a pool of his own blood, he also had a broken arm. This had become a huge disaster as an attempt at having fun had turned bad quickly. I felt bad, Lawler felt bad, but I think Frank felt even worse, at least it appeared he did. We called 911 and Frank was rushed to the hospital. I stayed with him until Jeff wrestled and joined us at the hospital. Eventually, we all drove back to Nashville. The result of his fun-gone-wrong was Frank had to miss a ton of bookings afterwards. Lawler and I paid for his hospital expenses, then we also split his pay between us every week to make sure he survived, since we both felt at fault for the incident. The building manager called and complained to Jerry Jarrett, which led to him being mad at me for clowning around. Once again, as he always did, Lawler made the save and took all the blame. Years later, I was retelling this story to Jerry Jarrett. When I informed him that Lawler and I had paid Frank every week out of our own pocket, Jerry laughed hysterically and said he was paying Frank weekly from the company as well, which meant Frank was being paid double and not having to work! For Lawler and most of the crew, this was the funniest locker room story in the history of the Memphis territory.

There were several buildings that I will never forget being able to not only enjoy shows at as a fan, but also remember for being iconic stops along the way as we promoted events around the territory. The list of buildings we frequently ran shows at includes the Mid-South Coliseum in Memphis, the Louisville Gardens, the Evansville Coliseum, the Rupp Arena, the Jonesboro American Legion Arena, the Tupelo Arena, the Nashville Fairgrounds, and of course, the studios of WMC TV-5 in Memphis for the weekly live television program. Another key part in the success of Memphis wrestling were the voices that fans welcomed into their living room each week, Lance Russell and Dave Brown. Lance and Dave were both tremendous at their jobs but also the endearing way they spoke to the audience that built a level of trust between the company and the fans.

Lance and Dave, along with the hundreds of wrestlers that provided the in-ring action, built something special that will live on forever. Today, many years since the last televised Memphis wrestling show, we all still care and look back on the promotion with fond memories.

Starting in 1971, pro wrestling had a historic run at the Mid-South Coliseum in Memphis. To many, the Mid-South Coliseum and Memphis wrestling go hand in hand. I think if you showed any fan from that era a picture of the Coliseum, the first thing that would come to mind would be the weekly Monday night wrestling events, even though the Coliseum had thousands of non-wrestling events throughout the years. Before the Fed-Ex Forum, or even the Pyramid, the Mid-South Coliseum was where all the big entertainment events happened in Memphis.

I could fill up volumes on a list of the most memorable matches that happened at the Mid-South Coliseum. For the purpose of this book, I will discuss the five most important matches in the history of the Coliseum. I realize this list is open to debate as it's my opinion.

Top 5 Memorable Matches at the Mid-South Coliseum:

5. Jerry Lawler vs Andy Kaufman (April 5, 1982): This was the first match between Lawler and Kaufman. I debated a lot with myself about even including this match in my list. It drew 8,091 fans but is probably the worst of the matches in my top five. As a wrestling purist, this is not the type of match that I enjoy. However, it would be unrealistic if I didn't rank this match in my top five, because it received the most national publicity than any match in the history of the Mid-South Coliseum. It led to the Lawler and Kaufman appearance on the David Letterman show on July 28, 1982. I don't think anyone would argue that this match made Jerry Lawler more famous nationwide than he had ever been before. This all led to several more appearances by Kaufman at the Coliseum. As far as the match itself, what I liked the most about it is that not only did the fans believe it was real, but wrestlers and promotors all over the country did, too. This speaks to the level of greatness of both Lawler and Kaufman.

4. Jerry Lawler vs Curt Hennig (May 9, 1988): This is the infamous match where Jerry Lawler finally captured the AWA World Championship after years of chasing for the title. It drew 8,000 fans, even with increased ticket prices. Jackie Fargo was the special referee for this match, chosen by the fans on a call-in voting line where the other choice was Curt's father, Larry. I agree with most folks that say this wasn't the best Lawler world

title match at the Coliseum, as he had several great matches over the years with various world champions during his quest for the gold. I was in attendance to see most of Lawler's world title matches, starting with the one between Lawler and Jack Brisco in 1974. I also saw Lawler challenge Terry Funk, Harley Race, Ric Flair, and Nick Bockwinkel. It's quite hard to rate these matches on a work rate scale, but I listed it as #4 because this was the match where he finally reached his dream of becoming world champion. The fans were more than ready for this to happen, and I think it's safe to say that the reaction to his win was the biggest pop I've ever heard at the Coliseum, with Jackie Fargo there to count the pin. I love watching this finish, even though Jackie made an awkward count that looks like he counted to four when you watch it back.

3. Jerry Lawler vs Austin Idol (April 27, 1988, Cage Match-Hair vs Hair): This is the match I probably get asked about the most. The attendance was 8,500. I was the assistant booker for Jerry Jarrett during this period, but I had little to no control over the creative of this match, as it was planned by Jerry Jarrett, Lawler, and Idol. This match saw Lawler lose the only hair match in his career. The finish is famous, as Tommy Rich came out from under the ring to screw Lawler out of the match. Rich had been hiding under the ring all night, and when he emerged, he was able to get involved even though the action took place inside a cage. I have several memories of this match. First, the barber didn't cut much of Lawler's hair at all afterwards. Second, I had never witnessed nearly 9000 people get so mad as they did at the end of this match. Third, as a member of the office, I felt it was my duty to walk Idol, Rich, and Paul E. Dangerously (Paul Heyman) back from the ring to the dressing rooms. What a wild scene that was, rushing through that mob of angry people. I'm still shocked that those fans didn't kill someone that night, they were that enraged. If you go back and watch this match, pay close attention to the fans at ringside in the chaotic aftermath. At one point you can even see a female fan attempting to climb the cage to either help Lawler or get to Idol and Rich, I'm not exactly sure. Once again, this shows how strongly Memphis wrestling made the fanbase feel and believe.

2. Al Greene vs Jackie Fargo (April 27, 1972, Hair vs Hair Match): Unfortunately, I wasn't in attendance for this match. This is another famous Hair vs Hair match which saw Greene defeat Fargo and was the first-ever

sellout for wrestling at the Coliseum, drawing 10,653 fans. The build for this match is what got me hooked on wrestling.

1. Jerry Lawler vs Bill Dundee (June 6, 1983, Loser Leaves Town Match): The attendance for this show was 11,300 and ended with Lawler defeating Dundee. This is number one on my list because it's my favorite match I've ever watched, and that includes live in person, on TV, or on PPV. It was a true masterpiece and the emotions of the crowd were high. The expectations for this match were that it would be a classic and they more than accomplished. I could watch this match every day and never get tired of it.

The best part of my career and the job was being on the road and dealing with all these great personalities. Some of these guys and girls I have talked about earlier in the book, some I haven't. Even though I might not tell detailed stories, I cherish all these great characters. The wrestlers of today might make more money, but I can assure you we had more fun, have more stories and have made relationships that will last forever.

Earlier, I discussed Doug Gilbert. In my booking run starting in 1994, Doug and I were very close. He was the work horse on the heel side. He was not in the shadow of his dad Tommy or his brother Eddie. I loved both Tommy and Eddie. And even though we got sideways once, Doug and I were tight and still are. Doug was over as a heel, along with Tommy Rich. They had so much heat and they drew a lot of money. Later, they switched to babyfaces and had a hell of a run. Doug had a long main event program with Brian Christopher, and they had great matches together. As heels, Doug and Tommy made PG-13 into main event talent. Without that program, PG-13, as good as they were, would probably not have become the level of stars they were in the territory. Doug just gets our business. He would have gone on to become a great booker if the territory system had survived.

I really believe PG-13 was the best long-term babyface team since The Fabulous Ones in Memphis. I'm sure they credit Tommy and Doug as much as I do for them getting over. Sure, I was booking, but even if they got a huge push, they wouldn't have been as over without Rich and Gilbert on the other side of the ring. Most people knew I liked Wolfie better than I did Jamie. People knew I traveled with Wolfie and stayed mad at Jamie, as he made me mad so often, I would rarely let him ride with us. At the same time, Jamie had a ton of talent and was very entertaining. They were both

very good as singles or even when paired with other partners, but together, they were magic and I don't think there is a better babyface team in current wrestling than PG-13 was then, just like I believe there isn't a better duo as heels now as there was then with Rich and Gilbert. Boys, thank you for making me look great as a booker. I will never forget those days.

Dutch Mantel was a great worker, a great talker and one of the smartest people in this business. When you watch his matches, there are no holes. He also had an incredibly believable way of doing interviews, no matter if he was portraying a hero or villain. When you look at the list of talents Dutch helped develop, nobody can top it. The Undertaker, Kane, and Steve Austin are just a few of the names Dutch hand a hand in developing. Dutch is respected by everyone. Just because he traveled to a lot of other territories, don't overlook how important Dutch was to Memphis, as well, as shown in his run with Tojo, Fuchi, and Onita. He had an amazing run with Randy Savage. I think Dutch's babyface program with Lawler was one of the best ever. To this day, I still remember his Bullwhip Matches with Bill Dundee. My advice for new wrestling fans it to find Dutch Mantel matches as you can learn so much from watching them. Dutch is a true star and, for those that don't know, he's also a great author. Check out his two books and listen to his podcasts. If you want to learn this business, Dutch is a master teacher.

Jackie Moore is now a WWE Hall of Famer. In Memphis, as Miss Texas, she is without a doubt the most over woman in the history of the territory. I dare you to find somebody that says anything bad about Jackie. She was tough and believable, but always professional and reliable. Like most, she almost starved to death at times in the territory days, but she survived, paid her dues, and drew money. I respect her so much.

Look at the talent who came through Memphis who became worldwide stars. It is a long list, but I will mention a few. Hulk Hogan was young and green but became a global star and arguably the most recognized name ever in wrestling to the mainstream audience. Brian Armstrong started in WWE as The Roadie but was later fired. He was rehired and found huge success as The Road Dogg in the Attitude Era. Power Pro was just beginning as he started to gain popularity. I remember one time I attended a WWE show in Nashville to get talent to appear at one of PPW's early Coliseum shows. Jim Cornette introduced me to Vince McMahon, and we started talking. Out of nowhere came a very loud Brian Armstrong running up to us as quickly as possible. We all assumed he was greeting Vince, but he ran right past Vince

and gave me a huge hug. We were all shocked. Brian then said, “Vince, you fired my ass before, and you will fire my ass again. Randy hired me then and he will hire me again when you fire me again!” With all of us speechless and shocked, off he went. It was classic.

I did not think Mick Foley as Cactus Jack had star potential when he came through Memphis in the late eighties. He worked a style I did not think would get over. At the time, we didn’t get along and boy I was I wrong about his ability to get over. I am prouder of him than anybody.

Other names that came through Memphis early in their careers include Undertaker, Steve Austin, Jimmy Hart, Kane, Godfather, Rick Rude, Honky Tonk Man, Sting, Ultimate Warrior, and countless others. I could go on and on because the list is so long. I cannot forget Randy Savage. In those days, Vince would sign talent and tell them not to give notice, to just leave and come work for him. Randy was the only wrestler in those days that wouldn’t do that. He gave a notice. He did business the right way on his way out with Lawler. He went on to become one of the biggest stars in the history of wrestling. It’s very sad that he left us way too early. Kurt Angle started his pro wrestling career in Memphis and he’s now in the WWE Hall of Fame. Daniel Bryan started here as the American Dragon and is guaranteed to be in the Hall of Fame as well. I had the chance to know Koko B. Ware from the time he made his debut and I loved his matches. He was always very nice to me and is still one of my favorite people. I loved his dropkicks and am very proud that he’s also been inducted into the WWE Hall of Fame. I remember one trip I made with Koko and the late great Buddy Wayne. Those two guys put away a bunch of beer. I miss Buddy. At times we would argue over the fact that the style of wrestling had changed so drastically over the years. Both Koko and Buddy were also involved in Power Pro.

Moving on to the Power Pro days, I’m very proud of those times and I think we would be telling a very different story in this book if Power Pro had lasted fifteen years instead of just three. I couldn’t have done Power Pro without the great help I received from Brandon Baxter. We were so different in one hand but so much alike in the other. Brandon was so smart and talented, especially to be so young when he got involved in wrestling. Even though he was my assistant and he learned under my learning tree, I must say that if PPW would’ve lasted, he would’ve been a much better booker than me. I am so proud of the success he has had in Jonesboro radio and

media. Jonesboro is my hometown, but he is more over in my hometown than I ever was. Derrick King was a young kid with talent, and he got over. He got on my nerves, but he had a great future. He was born to be a territory star and did so in Memphis. I loved my Young Guns Division. I'd like to give a shoutout and love to "Kid Wikkid" Tony Williams, Blade, Lance Jade, Alan Steel, Bulldog Raines and so many more that helped make that division, and the entire company, a success. Harry Del Rios had it all, certainly the look. He started for the USWA in the nineties, and he was in and out of Power Pro throughout the entire run. He appeared under different names, but he's most well known as The Spellbinder. He was under a WWE developmental deal several times over the years. He appeared in the first ever Power Pro match and he was also in the main event against Jerry Lawler on the last Power Pro TV show. I will never understand why he did not get a WWE run given how good he was. Tony Falk first started in Memphis in 1985. He had great runs over the years and was respected by all. Proof of that is in the books by Mick Foley, Steve Austin, the Rock and more. He had Jeff Jarrett's first match and was one of Kurt Angle's first Power Pro opponents as well. Not only was he a great wrestler, but he was one of my most important right-hand men. With Tony on the head sets at the GO position, I knew that he always had everything under control. I love my Power Pro guys and appreciate all the hard work you did to make the company work. For you, the heart and work horses of the company, I am sorry, and I take the blame that it was over way too soon.

I am writing this book like I wrote TV. I've tried to make each chapter fast paced with a suitable main event. I like this last story for this chapter not only because it involves Memphis legends mixed with a new promotion that has become very popular, but also for the life lesson it provides that I think everyone could benefit from.

In the wrestling business, you meet a wide variety of people, just as you do in almost every other career. I recently met someone for the first time that I had first had email correspondence with about twenty-five years ago. There is a moral to this story is that the way we treat people today can make an impact in your life not only tomorrow, but at any point in your life and at any age.

For any readers living in a cave, or to those that no longer follow the current happenings in the wrestling world, I'd like to tell you about Tony Khan. Tony is the son of a billionaire and part owner of several businesses,

including the Jacksonville Jaguars NFL team. In 2019, Tony founded a new pro wrestling company named All Elite Wrestling, or AEW. Tony is a life-long wrestling fan and has been a serious student of the sport. In late 2019, I was contacted by Dave Meltzer, editor of the Wrestling Observer, asking if it was okay for him to share my contact with Chris Harrington with AEW. I agreed and Chris later explained that AEW had a big TV taping scheduled on January 8, 2020 in the Memphis area, specifically at the Desoto Civic Center in Southaven, MS, which is right outside of Memphis. Chris informed me that Tony Khan was a huge fan of Memphis wrestling and wanted to a Memphis Wrestling Tribute Night at the event. Tony wanted me to appear at the meet and greet and provide AEW with contact information for several of the Memphis legends. I was honored to be asked to take part of the event and especially happy that they wanted to pay tribute to Memphis wrestling history in 2020 on large platform, as AEW airs every Wednesday night on TNT. I was also quite happy with the financial offer they made to me. The trip would only be eighty miles one-way, and I would be able to make the trip with my friend Brandon Baxter.

The event went great and I was able to see Dave Brown, Jimmy Valiant, Kevin Lawler, Austin Idol, Doug Gilbert, Shane Russell, Rick Morton, Robert Gibson and Lanny Poffo. Leading up to the event, I had suggested other names as well. For reasons I am not aware of, Bill Dundee was booked on the show, but was later removed, even though he was paid. I felt like this was a mistake, because, in my opinion, Bill was a huge star to the Memphis fans and those same fans would love to see him be honored. To me, it’s hard to have a Memphis Wrestling Tribute Night without Bill Dundee. After Bill informed me that he was taken off the event, I told him I would not be attending either. He replied for me to not be stupid, that I should go and enjoy the event and make the money, so I went as planned. Later, it was amusing to me that many wrestlers, including Tom Prichard, blamed me Bill’s absence. I would have done everything in my power to have Bill booked on that show. Another name missing in attendance when you’re having a tribute to Memphis was Jerry Lawler, but his absence was well known ahead of time due to him being under contract with WWE.

At the show, AEW did wonderful tributes for Randy Savage, Tommy and Doug Gilbert, Lance Russell, and Brian Christopher Lawler. The event ended up being a first-class experience and I appreciated them doing it. I also enjoyed getting to see Chris Jericho, Jim Ross, and Marko Stunt again

and I had great conversations with all three. Being a fan of Dusty Rhodes, I was pleased to meet his son, Cody. Brandon and I stayed for the entire show and both had a great time catching up with old friends and seeing them be honored by their peers and the fans.

After the show, I talked for a long time with JR. Near the end of our conversation, Tony Khan walked up and extended his hand. I went to introduce myself, but he quickly cut me off. Even with my motto of “expect the unexpected”, I was taken aback. This is where the life lesson part of the story comes into play. Tony explained that twenty-five years ago, he was such a fan of the business side of pro wrestling that in his spare time, he would practice writing and booking his own wrestling shows. He explained he had always loved Memphis and he followed shows I had written and booked. He said when he found out I was a member of a pro wrestling message board that he frequented, he sent me a copy of a Monday Night Raw show that he had written as an exercise and had asked for my feedback. When I heard this, I almost passed out, because back when he would have sent me this, I was a different person, because the wrestling business was different. I instantly wondered if I was mean or rude to him, or even possibly cussed him out. I looked Tony directly in the eye and asked him, point blank, if I had been a prick to him. I expected the worst from his answer, but instead he countered with a question of his own: “If you were a prick to me back then, do you really think I would’ve booked you here tonight and paid you as well as I am?” He went on to say that I had quickly responded to him all those years ago, and that I was complimentary to him and his writing and even offered a few suggestions to improve.

The moral of this story is simple. When you’re nice to people, they usually always remember it, even if it’s twenty-five years later. It really is a small world after all. When I responded to Tony’s email in a nice and respectful way, I had no idea that, years later, he would go on to start a wrestling promotion of his own, secure a primetime cable TV slot, and produce what has become, by far, my current favorite wrestling TV show to watch. Be nice to all people. Not only is it how we should treat everyone anyway, with dignity and respect, but also because you never know what a person will eventually go on to accomplish later in life. Burning bridges in any profession is never a good idea, but especially in the wrestling business.

CHAPTER 22:

The Finish

After Eddie died, I did not know what the next step in my life would be. In his mind, Eddie died thinking Jerry Jarrett would take care of me. However, I did not want that to happen, nor did I expect that to happen. A few days after Eddie passed, Jerry and I had a falling out. For years, Jerry had little or no relationship with his three sons. Eddie never understood why Jerry and his wife had a falling out with his son, Jason. I was told, in clear terms, by both Jerry and Deborah to not have a relationship with Jason or his family…but I was not going to be controlled. Four days after Eddie was buried, I headed back to my hometown of Jonesboro, Arkansas. I have not spoken to Jerry since.

I was starting over and had not worked in a year. Before I left, Randy and Dianne West gave me money to pay off my car. Jason Jarrett was very generous as well. I survived on that money and I do very good with merchandise sales at RandyHalesMemphisWrestling.com. I started the job search process but unfortunately, I had no luck. As I came close to running out of money, Jerry Lawler came through for me yet again. Not only did he send money, he came up with the idea for my next venture. He takes Uber rides in Memphis all the time. One day, he had a female driver who was a big wrestling fan. She asked about three people: Bill Dundee, Brian Christopher, and Randy Hales. She then told him how good she did financially as an Uber driver. He called me and said he had an idea to get me out of my slump. He said he knew I liked money, people, and driving, so Uber would be the perfect project for me. I started with Uber in October of 2019 and it has been a blessing, both financially and for providing me a better quality of life. While working for Uber, I can make my own hours. That leaves time for my website, merchandise business, podcast and live shows on social media. This allows me to still have a connection to Memphis wrestling, which has always been so important to me. As I am coming closer to age 60, I am busy and most importantly, I am happy. I am back home in Jonesboro where my story began.

Most people have dreams. Some want to be president. Some want to be doctors or nurses. Some aspire to be in professional sports. My dream was to be involved with Memphis wrestling. I lived the dream, and it's been a hell of a ride. My dream was realized with Power Pro Wrestling. That part of my life ended when the television contract was not renewed in 2001. Originally, the title of this book was *The Birth, Life and Death of Power Pro Wrestling.* It didn't take me long to realize that my story is about a lot more than just Power Pro Wrestling, hence the change of the title to *Living the Dream, The Randy Hales Story*. The more life changes, the more it stays the same. As I look back and reflect, I see how the direction of my life changed when I got hooked on wrestling when I first watched it on Channel 13 in the early seventies when I was ten years old.

It should be obvious by reading this book that my love of wrestling continued long after I started watching. Sure, I have done other things, but Memphis wrestling has been my love story. I know that is not normal and will probably sound strange to some. I also know at times, the wrestling business has been unhealthy for me, but I had the dream. Everybody in my life, from my childhood friends, to my adult friends, to my wrestling friends, and even my own family, would probably have picked another dream for me to aspire to. Even though it has been over twenty years since I have made a living in wrestling, it is still who I am. It is why I moved to Hendersonville to stay with Eddie Marlin. It is why I do the Memphis wrestling website. It is why I do a Memphis wrestling podcast, live shows on Facebook and Twitter called Talking Memphis Wrestling, as well as a weekly sports talk radio show here in Jonesboro on the local station I grew up listening to. It's why I live alone. The last few years, everything has changed. My aunt, grandmother, sister, brother-in-law and parents are all gone. Eddie Marlin, my second father, is gone. I still have my nieces and their kids, and for that I am grateful. I am thankful for my family and friends that I have in my life. I'm also thankful that the passion for Memphis wrestling still lives inside of me. It has been a huge part of my life since I was a child. It's a part of my identity. In many ways, I am the Memphis wrestling guy, and as I say all the time, "I'm Memphis wrestling born, Memphis wrestling bred, and when I die, I'll be Memphis wrestling dead!"

I spend 10-12 hours a day driving for Uber. On social media, I interact with people from all over the world. These days, pro wrestling is a different

game. There are very few similarities to how the business used to be. Most young people only know how wrestling is now. Even though we now have AEW, NJPW, ROH, Impact, MLW and others, to most, there is one wrestling company in the world, and that is WWE. From talking to some of the younger people I interact with, they don't seem to understand what I did in the business or how Memphis wrestling made a difference on the culture. Even though I often tell them about my experiences in Memphis wrestling, they have no clue. Several of them have asked if I have any regrets and say I didn't make it big time. I get where they're coming from, but they just don't understand. They feel that if you don't make it in WWE, you don't make it at all.

Here's the deal: I was a skinny, tall kid who had no desire to do anything else in life. All my friends thought I was nuts for pursuing the dream I went after. Every one of them did not think I had a chance to make it and become successful. That dream started as a kid by selling wrestler's pictures, which led to a chance to be ring announcer every week in front of a thousand people as a freshman in high school. It then progressed to promoting events and becoming an on-air personality on what I think is the best television wrestling show in history. I was then able to begin producing that show, and eventually became the General Manager and booker of the Memphis wrestling promotion. Finally, it led to my role as Owner, Founder and President of Power Pro Wrestling. My heroes became my friends. I lived the life of a rock star. Even after all these years have passed since it ended, I'm still known as the Memphis Wrestling Guy. It was my dream, and I *lived it*. So, when some young people ask if I regret the fact that I didn't make it, I say to them: make no mistake about it…in my eyes, I made it.

After spending months working on my life story, I thought I had this manuscript finished. I sent it to my editor and proofreader, Craig Allen. As we read the finished product, it did not feel complete, so I returned to my desk and got busy writing again. I spent some time reflecting and creating, and I realized I needed to change the finish. For me, Memphis wrestling went away twenty years ago. Since that time, I have lived a very happy and successful life. However, for better or worse, I can't get Memphis wrestling out of my system…and maybe I shouldn't. Instead of making excuses or running from this fact, I've decided to embrace it. Memphis wrestling will always be a part of me. It's in my blood, and I'm happy with that.

Recently, I had a social media encounter with a local independent wrestler named Dustin Starr. Dustin is a good talent and has been successful, but not to the level of his dreams. He, and a lot of other current independent wrestlers, have a tremendous resentment of the glory days of Memphis wrestling. In a text message, Dustin informed me that he believed the glory days of Memphis wrestling are dead and have been for over twenty years. He said that nobody cared about that era or what I had to say. In his opinion, I am no longer relevant. They hate the fact so many people, like those reading this book, have great memories of a time long ago that will never be forgotten and will never be replicated. They missed out on those days and they will never have a chance to *Live the Dream.*

It has been a wild ride and a crazy experience, as I've shared in these chapters. There were millions of miles traveled. I met a lot of wonderful people, some of whom I lost along the way. Sure, there were mistakes made and even a few regrets. There were tears shed, but there were also millions of great memories and successes. The bottom line is that I lived my dream. Thank you for taking this ride with me and allowing me to share my journey with you. You're never too old to dream, and there are still dreams left in me. My story is far from over.

CHAPTER 23:

Memphis Wrestling Timeline

Doing a complete history of Memphis wrestling would require dozens of books. However, for this book, I feel this chapter is necessary. I am creating a timeline of the most important matches/events/wrestlers in history. This is not going to be a complete history, but it will point out critical events. I will list the event, the date and give some history about the event.

1959: Early in 1959, WMC TV-5 brought local wrestling to television in Memphis. Later that year, WHBQ-13 started airing wrestling, beginning the studio wrestling and Lance Russell era in Memphis.

1959: Over 15,000 watched Billy Wicks wrestle Sputnik Monroe in Russwood Park, with former boxing champion Rocky Marciano as special referee.

1967: Jerry Jarrett starting as referee, then as a wrestler in Memphis

Jerry Jarrett's life story deserves a book. Oh wait, Jerry did write a book, "The Best of Times" and I highly recommend it. I will not attempt to write his story here, but I will sum it up. Jerry's father left when Jerry was young. He was raised by his mother, Christine Jarrett and his grandparents. They were poor. Christine was a working mom and she found work at the wrestling offices of Nick Gulas and Roy Welch in Nashville. At a young age Jerry started selling tickets and as he got older, started promoting smaller towns. Eventually, Jerry saw the money was in wrestling, being in the main event and being part of the office. Against his mother's advice, Jerry started refereeing, then wrestling. Jerry started driving promoter and booker Roy Welch to the Memphis matches every Monday night. Without Jerry knowing it, in those rides, Roy was mentoring Jerry and teaching him not only the wrestling business but letting him start being a part of the creative process.

1969: Jerry Jarrett started as match maker, booker and television producer in Memphis

Much has been written about Jerry's creative ability and his schools as a promoter. Still today, many consider Jerry to be the most creative booker in the history of the business. He is certainly in everybody's (except Bruce Prichard) top ten. More on Bruce later. Jerry had great success as a wrestler. Jerry was a young, small, good looking babyface. In a stroke of brilliance, Jerry formed a long-time tag team partnership with, evil heel, Tojo Yamamoto. Tojo was the mentor and trainer who saved Jerry from the hated heels. Jerry was the sympathetic babyface and the talker of the bunch where Tojo was the established ass kicker and veteran.

Jerry was a key part, not only as a booker, but as a main event, of making Memphis Wrestling so historic. Jerry was over in all the cities in the territories and Jerry, Tojo and Jackie Fargo sold out every arena in the territory. In the beginning, Jerry's appeal was to the young ladies for his looks and youth and to the men, who admired his never give up attitude. Jerry's wrestling "character" worked best as the underdog. Jerry grew up poor but was always smart and never gave up. Jarrett connected with the audience because they could relate to him.

As popular as Jerry was in every city, by far he was the most popular in Louisville. Louisville was a big city that had not had wrestling in years. Jerry opened Louisville in 1971 or 1972 as the promoter, but quickly became the most popular wrestler on the cards. Louisville wrestling had tremendous history and many sellouts. Louisville saw almost as many stars as Memphis did. I would say that the most popular wrestler in Louisville wrestling history and the wrestler that drew the biggest crowds was Jerry Jarrett.

I will conclude this section on Jerry Jarrett by switching to a negative, tell the truth attitude. Not everybody likes Jerry Jarrett. Not everybody liked Nick Gulas and Roy Welch. Not everybody liked me as a promoter and not everybody likes Vince McMahon. That is the nature of the beast of being the promoter. However, almost everybody that was associated with Jerry says that he is one of the most creative and successful promoters in history. I think his success has been documented and I don't know how it could be argued. One person has loudly disagreed for over 25 years and that person is Bruce Prichard, formerly Brother Love with WWE and a long-time office person/assistant for Vince. The first time I met Bruce in 1998, he painted Jerry in a negative light and would say that he was not impressed with Jerry's creativity at all. I never knew why Bruce seemed to hate Jerry.

Wrestling fans knew Bruce as Brother Love. Most had no clue of Bruce's role in WWE. I would say that Bruce's role was never as important as he says it was. In the last few years, Bruce started doing a poplar wrestling podcast. Bruce has the habit of not letting the truth get in the way of a good story. He often uses Jerry as the butt of his jokes. I will close by saying that if Bruce really believes that Jerry Jarrett is stupid, that he is a bad booker and a bad promoter, Bruce is the stupid one. I don't think he is that stupid. I don't think he likes Jerry, probably because he did not feel Jerry kissed his ass when Jerry was in the WWE, and that's okay. I think he says Jerry is not creative, a hick, and dumb because it will get attention. It will get people like me talking. It will make him relevant, which is a fine approach if that's your end goal.

1970: Jerry Lawler made his Memphis wrestling debut on August 17 at the old Ellis Auditorium.

1971: Monday Night Wrestling moved to the new Mid-South Coliseum, drawing over 9,000 fans. Tag Matches headlined the show. The Von Brauners faced Jackie and Rough House Fargo in the semi-final match and in the Main Event, Jerry Jarrett and Tojo Yamamoto wrestled Don and Al Greene. The date was June 7.

1972: First wrestling sellout at the Coliseum. The date was August 8 for the famous Hair vs Hair match between Jackie Fargo and Al Green. Later, the Coliseum would add more seating, but this card sold out at 10,653. It would be years before I would attend a card at the Coliseum, but this was the card that hooked me on Memphis Wrestling for life. As a kid, Jackie Fargo was my favorite wrestler, but this match really put me over the top. The TV show hyping this card was the first-time wrestling made me cry, but it wasn't the last. Al Greene had been challenging Jackie Fargo to a Hair vs Hair match. Fargo kept saying no, not because he was a coward, but because Fargo thought Al would stack the deck. Finally, on the hype television show the Saturday before the event, Al Green said on a live interview with Lance that Fargo was just like his dead daddy, a coward. Fargo came out after to talk to Lance and to the fans. Fargo talked about his dad, started crying and accepted the match. This was the first time I saw that personal issues draw money.

1973: Booker Jarrett brought Jerry Lawler back in the territory and had Lawler form a team with Jim White. At first, Jimmy Kent was their manager, but it was with Sam Bass that they became one of the most

successful tag teams in Memphis history. Memphis was always known as a tag team territory, but the teams were usually big guys, did not move very fast, and basically just beat up their opponents. Lawler and White were different. They were smaller, cocky, would cheat, fly around and take big crazy bumps for their opponents, then cheat more to win. The Lawler and White team drew record crowds, with multiple sell outs against top stars like Jerry Jarrett, Jackie Fargo, Rough House Fargo and Tojo Yamamoto. They were a great team, but everybody knew that Lawler had the potential of being the biggest star of them all.

1974: This is the year Jerry Lawler became The King. First, he defeated Tommy Gilbert for his first Southern Title run. This is the year of the longest run of sellouts streak in Memphis history, as Lawler started his quest for the World Title. This is a Jerry Jarrett story that was the theme of the central story in the territory for 14 years. We lived the story of Jerry Lawler's battle for the world title. During this year, Lawler would sell out the Mid-South Coliseum and begin his quest for the title by battling Jackie Fargo, Rick Gibson, Jerry Jarrett, Tojo and many of the other local stars. Jarrett would also bring in many worldwide stars as The Sheik, Dick the Bruiser, Bobo Brazil, Mr. Wrestling II, Jerry Brisco, and many more. I believe 1974 was the most successful year ever in attendance in Memphis history.

Note: Over the years, almost every World Title match Lawler received in Memphis sold out. It did amazing business for over a decade. His first World Title Match was against Jack Brisco but over the years he faced Harley Race, Terry Funk, Ric Flair, Nick Bockwinkel and Curt Hennig.

1975: The debut of Bill Dundee and George Barnes. 1974 was record business and it was due to the singles career rise of Jerry Lawler. However, Lawler was getting tired of the amount of time he was on the road and had a falling out with Jarrett. He was either fired or left to go somewhere. There were those that thought business would collapse without Lawler, but Jerry Jarrett found a new tag team in Australia, George Barnes and Bill Dundee. They made their debut on Feb 11, 1975, quickly moving to main events and proving themselves as big money draws. Barnes got homesick and left after three months. Dundee stays and still lives in the area today. Jarrett's mother, Christine always thought Bill was too good looking to be a heel. Finally, Jerry decided to switch Bill babyface. The rest is history.

1976: The debut of Rocky Johnson. Sports fans around the world always ask the question of who would win between a wrestler and a boxer. Around this time, the debate was even more due to a mixed match between Muhamad Ali and Antonio Inoki in Japan. Jerry Jarrett thought that he could do big business with Lawler against a boxer, but Jarrett wanted to find a professional wrestler with boxing experience to have the match with Lawler. This was back in the days before national cable so the people living in Memphis would not know wrestlers from other areas. There were wrestling magazines but because few covered the Memphis area at that time, very few wrestling fans in Memphis would buy the magazines. Jerry found the guy. Rocky Johnson had wrestled in several territories in the US and was a top guy. He had also sparred with World Boxing Champion George Foreman. Rocky was a big guy who could talk and looked like a million dollars. The match was scheduled for the Mid-South Coliseum on June 21, 1976 and was promoted on TV and on the local news as a legitimate wrestler vs boxer match. Lawler won the match, selling out the Coliseum. This was meant to be a one-time only match, but everybody was impressed with Rocky. Johnson returned two weeks later for a return match that drew over 10,000. He then started full time in August of 76, feuding with Lawler but also forming a tag team with Bill Dundee. Rocky challenged for the NWA World Title on March 1, 1976. That match was a sell out in Memphis. Jerry Jarrett left Nick Gulas to start a new promotion. Jarrett's first Coliseum show was on April 24, 1977, with 9,000 fans in attendance to see Rocky get his second chance at the NWA Title. Rocky chose to go with Jarrett instead of with Gulas. Rocky would leave for another territory in 1978 but would return in 1987. It is interesting to note that in 1976, Rocky's young son Dewey, later to be known to the world as The Rock, would make his first ever TV appearance, along with his parents, in a Christmas special on Channel 13. 29 years later, Dewey would appear in Memphis as Flex Kavana in 1996.

1977: The Big Split

I could write a book about The Big Split of 1977. Officially, Nick Gulas and Roy Welch owned the Memphis territory. However, Jerry Jarrett was the booker and he was the brains behind the success. Jerry had thought he had bought a percentage of the company. However, when Nick insisted Jerry bring in Nick's son George full-time on the Memphis end, Jerry said no. That is when Jarrett found out he did not purchase the percentage he

thought he did but had just purchased an option that had already expired. It ended up as the worst move Nick could've made, and even though it looked bad at the time for Jerry, it ended up being the best thing to ever happen to him. Jerry resigned from Gulas and quickly made plans to open his own company. Except for Jackie Fargo and Tojo Yamamoto, all the wrestlers decided to go with Jarrett. Jarrett would go to TV-5 and come to an agreement for them to air live shows every week. Within a few months, and without any local TV, Nick Gulas would pull out of Memphis. Jerry Jarrett had the city all to himself and the glory days were just around the corner.

1978: Jarrett switched to the AWA

Under Gulas, Memphis was always a member of the NWA. In the beginning, Jarrett went with the NWA and had several dates from World Champion Harley Race. However, due to having very few dates with the champion, and knowing that he would probably never have a title change in Memphis, Jarrett decided to go with the AWA. This was the right move as Lawler's matches with Nick Bockwinkel drew huge crowds for ten years and Lawler won the AWA Championship in 1988.

The first card as AWA took place on August 21, 1978, drawing over 11,000. This was the card: *Pork Chop Cash, Steve Kyle, Bearcat Brown defeated Hans Schroeder, Don Bass and The Bounty Hunters.*

NWA WORLD WOMEN'S TAG TITLE: Beverly Shade & Natasha defeated Ann Casey and Sherri Lee Bill Dundee, Dick the Bruiser, Tommy Gilbert and Wayne Ferris battled Joe Leduc, John Louie and the Valiant Brothers to a No Contest World Jr. Title: Nelson Royal defeated Jackie Welch Title: Verne Gagne defeated Eddie Sullivan AWA World Tag Title: Greg Gagne and Jim Brunzell defeated Frankie Lane and Mike Boyer.

AWA World Title: Jerry Lawler defeated Nick Bockwinkel by DQ

1979: The Hogan Debut 1979: The Tupelo Concession Stand Brawl 1980: Lawler breaks leg, Hart-Lawler angle 1981: Hogan vs Lawler 1982: Lawler vs Andy Kaufman 4-5-82

1983: Lawler and Jarrett almost split up 1985: The Debut of S**ting and Ultimate Warrior**

1986: Randy Hales moves to Memphis, Jeff Jarrett debuts 1986: Last sell out of Mid-South Coliseum for wrestling 3-10-86

1988: Debut of Cactus Jack 1988: Lawler wins AWA World Title 1989: The debuts of Steve Austin and the Undertaker 1989: Lance leaves, Randy leaves 1990: Jarrett goes to Texas 1993: Randy is back

1993: WWE Relationship 1994: Lance Russell Returns and Monday Night memories 1994: Randy booking 1995: Smoky Mountain vs USWA feud 1996: The debut of the Rock 1997: Lawler and Jarrett sell, Dave quits, Randy quits, USWA closes after being canceled from TV-5

1998: Power Pro Opens 2001: Power Pro Closes

CHAPTER 24:

Power Pro Wrestling Alumni

I am going to divide the Power Pro roster into different groups: Memphis legends, WWE Superstars, WWE Developmental Talent and local talent. Some of these talents can be listed in several different groups. I start by listing those who were a big help behind the scenes. I am listing names that appeared either live on television, on video tape or at least one live event. Some of the talents listed were never full-time members of the Power Pro roster.

MANAGEMENT AND BEHIND THE SCENES

Randy Hales: Owner, President, Executive Producer, Head Writer, Talent Brandon Baxter: Talent, Producer, Agent, Writer, Talent Relations Buddy Wayne: Senior Promoter/Live Events Downtown Bruno: Head Referee/Talent/Agent/Manager Aubrey Wayne: Referee

Will Gibson: Referee

Joey Jenkins: Referee

Dave Brown: TV Host, Advisor Corey Maclin: TV Host, Advisor, Advertising and Public Relations Tony Falk: Wrestler, Manager, Floor Producer, Talent Relations Jerry Lawler: Consultant, Producer, Writer, Promoter, Wrestler, Bill Dundee: Wrestler, Consultant, Talent Relations, Producer, Writer Jim Cornette: Manager, Developmental, WWE rep, Booker, Writer, Producer WMC TV 5: Mason Granger, Bill Applegate, Creighton Armour, James Estes, Mark Smith and a cast of thousands!

MEMPHIS LEGENDS AND MAINSTAYS

Jerry Lawler
Bill Dundee
Dangerous Doug Gilbert
Tommy Rich
Tommy Gilbert and Peggy Gilbert Beautiful Bobby Eaton
The Fabulous Ones
The Rock N Roll Express
Handsome Jimmy Valiant
Austin Idol
Moondog Spot

Dirty White Boy
Tony Falk (Too Falk 4 Sure) Fantastic Tommy Rogers
Sid Vicious
Billy Travis
Paul Diamond
Dirty White Boy
King Cobra
Koko B Ware
Tracy Smothers
Reggie B Fine
Spellbinder
Wolfie D
Miss Jackie Moore
Stacy the Kat Carter
Jim Cornette

<u>WWE MAIN ROSTER TALENT/NATIONAL KNOWN TALENT</u>

Stone Cold Steve Austin: (video only) The Rock: (video interviews, live event appearance at Coliseum) Mick Foley: (video interviews only) Triple H: (video interview only) Kane: (video interviews, live appearance at Coliseum) Mae Young (appeared as Mother Stasiak, live television, live events) Kurt Angle (live television, live events, held Power Pro Championship) Jeff Jarret: (video interviews, live event appearance at Coliseum) Brian Christopher Lawler: (live television, live events) Road Dogg Jessie James (video interviews, live event) Daniel Bryan: (As the masked American Dragon, developmental, 2000-2001) The Godwinns: (live television, live events) Rikishi: (live television, live events, as JR Smooth, Power Pro Champion) Terry Gordy

Michael Hayes: (video interviews, live television appearances, live events) Road Warrior Hawk: (live television, live events) Mark Henry (live events)

Bob Holly
Crash Holly: (as Erin O'Grady in developmental) Mabel
Sir Mo
Bart Gunn
Tom Prichard

Giant Silva (as the Giant King) Scott Taylor: (teaming with Brian Christopher as Too Much for live television) Dr. Death Steve Williams

WWE DEVELOPMENTAL TALENT

Kurt Angle

Daniel Bryan (as American Dragon) Matt Bloom: (as Baldo, currently head trainer at NXT) Steve Bradley

Rico Constantino

Slick Robbie D

Nick Dinsmore: (as Nick Dinsmore, before EUGENE in WWE) Erin O'Grady: (before Crash Holly in WWE) Slick Robbie D

Vic Grimes

Damaja

Glenn Kulka

Shawn Stasiak (before WWE run as Meat) Mean Street Posse (Rodney, Joey Abs, Pete Gas) Spanky

Scotty Sabre

Scott Vick

Kris Kannonball

Seven

Lance Cade

BJ Payne

Mic Tierney

POWER PRO MAINSTAYS, ONE TIME APPEARANCES OR OCCASIONAL APPEARANCES

Brandon Baxter: Power Pro Original Derrick King: Power Pro Original Kidd Wikkid: Power Pro Original Ali: Became a top star toward the end of the series. Character created and discovered by Brandon Baxter Alan Steel

Bulldog Raines

Lance Jade

Bobby Bronze

Blade

Kevin Lawler (as the Yellow Jacket, guest commentary, manager) CB Wyatt: (also known as CB Hales) Johnny Rotten

Heinrich Von Keller

Flash Flanigan

Tony Falk (Power Pro Original) Chris Michaels

Trailer Park Trash

Beau James (Power Pro Original, aka The Bodyguard) Jason Lee

Kip Morris

Rick Havoc
Outlaw Don Bass (Memphis legend, made a handful of appearances)

PICTURES

Eddie Marlin, a young RH, and Randy Wade.

Plowboy Frazier, Jimmy Hart, Lance Russell, and Randy Hales

Lance Russell and RH, through the years.

The infamous fireball from "Hot Stuff" Eddie Gilbert

The King, RH, and Double J

RH and Lanny Poffo

With "King"
Jerry Lawler

Alongside the greatest announce team of all time, Lance Russell and Dave Brown.

Monday Night Memories artwork done by Jerry Lawler.

David Oswald (bottom and right) and I graduated high school together. He and Danny Davis were the first Nightmares tag team.

RH and Brandon Baxter

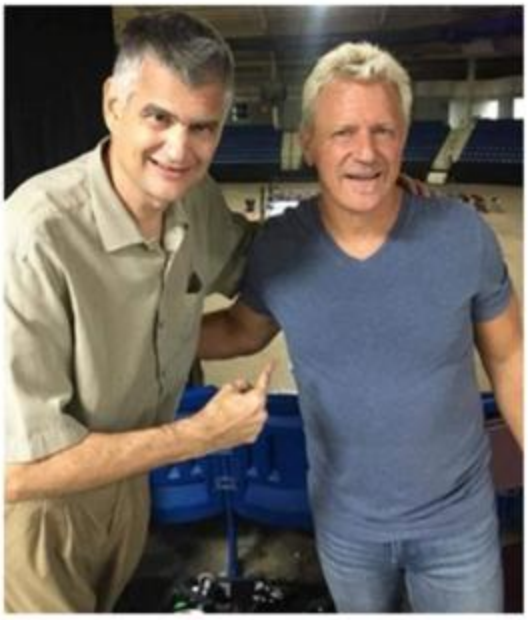
With "Superstar" Bill Dundee, one of my best friends in the business.

It is always great to see WWE Hall of Famer, Mick Foley, aka Cactus Jack.

RH with
"Handsome"
Jimmy Valiant.

With my
wrestling
father, Eddie
Marlin

With my friend "Double J"
Jeff Jarrett



"Superstar" Bill Dundee and RH (luckily, nobody had to take a chair shot this day.

The King and RH…and a lot of Christmas spirit!

With Derrick King. DK was a PPW mainstay for the entire run of the company.

Jim Cornette is both a friend and one of the best managers and talkers ever in the business.

Eddie was delighted to have a surprise visit from Cornette.

RH and Kevin Lawler

RH, Dave Brown, and Brandon Baxter, back together in the WMC-TV5 Studio many years later, where so many great PPW moments happened.

With the late, great Brian Christopher Lawler. Gone far too soon.

RH and Brandon Baxter, with Memphis legend and another of the greatest managers of all time, "The Mouth of the South" Jimmy Hart.

With Dave Brown

RH and "Handsome" Jimmy Valiant

The boys are back in town! Handsome Jimmy Valiant, Brandon Baxter, Shane Russell, Robert Gibson, RH, Kevin Lawler, Doug Gilbert, Ricky Morton, Lanny Poffo, and Austin Idol at the AEW Tribute to Memphis Wrestling night, 2020.

"The Universal Heartthrob" Austin Idol and RH, AEW Tribute to Memphis Wrestling

Doug Gilbert, RH, and Dave Brown at AEW Tribute to Memphis Wrestling, 2020

With Joe Wheeler

Just another Saturday morning on Union Avenue-a wild brawl between Stacey, RH, and Brandon Baxter.

"Superstar" Bill Dundee and RH

"Handsome" Jimmy Valiant and RH, AEW Tribute to Memphis Wrestling

The boys are back in town! Handsome Jimmy Valiant, Brandon Baxter, Shane Russell, Robert Gibson, RH, Kevin Lawler, Doug Gilbert, Ricky Morton, Lanny Poffo, and Austin Idol at the AEW Tribute to Memphis Wrestling night, 2020.

"The Universal Heartthrob" Austin Idol and RH, AEW Tribute to Memphis Wrestling

Doug Gilbert, RH, and Dave Brown at AEW Tribute to Memphis Wrestling, 2020

RH through the years: baby in a bowl, cowboy, and 1980 High School Graduation.

With my parents, late 1960's (left) and 1970's (right)

Hales Family picture, (1970's)

With my sister, mother, and grandmother

Mother and I in Poplar Bluff (Left); and in 2007 (Right)

My mother was the most special person in my life. She meant the world to me. I was and will always be a mama's boy…and I'm proud of it.

With my sister, Judy Wyse

With my
sister, Judy,
in Cape Cod
(2018)

My sister, Judy, and her husband, Bill

Hales Family
at Christmas

My niece, Cyndi,
and family

My niece, Traci, and family

Jeff Jarrett, RH, and my newborn great nephew Corban, 1995

My niece, Ami and family (Corban, back row center, is the baby from the picture above with Jeff Jarrett)

My nieces (Ami, Cyndi, and Traci) and I at my sister Judy's funeral

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

You would not be reading this book if my life in the wrestling business hadn't happened, and I must thank the people that were responsible for that. If it wasn't for Charlie, Lucille, and Randy Wade taking me to the Jonesboro matches every week when I was a kid, none of the rest would have happened. In Jonesboro, a big part of my life was The Elwood Family, Bob, his late wife Sylvia, and their sons Lee, Tom and Rodney. Rodney was a few years younger than me but loved wrestling and ended up traveling all over with me.

Once I got involved in wrestling, I would never have moved forward if it wasn't for Eddie Marlin giving me the chance to sell pictures and then allowing me to do ring announcing. After that, Jerry Jarrett, Jerry Lawler and Bill Dundee took a chance on me by bringing me into the business and most importantly, teaching me all about it. I must also thank Frank Morrell and Jeff Jarrett. The three of us would ride together almost every day, and the veteran Frank taught me and Jeff so much about the business.

Early on, when I had the dream that most thought was impossible, I thank my mother, dad, grandmother, sister and brother-in-law for always encouraging me to pursue my dream, even during rough patches. Currently, I have support from the family that is still with me. Thanks to Ami, Cyndi, Traci, Corban, Caanan, Jake, Will and Cal, along with their significant others, for always being there for me. Most of the family pictures were provided by Traci, Cyndi, and Ami.

Thanks to WMC TV-5 for putting Power Pro on the air. Thanks to every single wrestler, referee, announcer and fan. I could not have had the Power Pro journey without Dave, Corey, Lawler, Dundee, Brandon and the WWE.

This book project is very special to me. It was a spur of the moment idea. To be honest, writing a book is out of my comfort zone. Thanks to Jon Wilbanks, Scott Mangrum (Justin Case), Tony Falk, Beau James, and Randy Wade for your help. Also, special thanks to Craig Allen. Craig helped me and Brandon at TV during the later days of PPW. He also served as proofreader and editor for this book. Scott Mangrum has helped me with graphics, not only for this book, but has also been my go-to guy for graphics over the years on all my platforms.

I decided there was interest in my story after great support and feedback of my stories on my Facebook and Twitter live shows as well as on my Memphis Memories podcast. I really want to thank my co-host and

producer Sean Reedy for getting me back in the spotlight. Sean was very good to me during the hard times.

Adam Dunn can probably tell you more about Power Pro Wrestling than anybody else out there. We have become great friends. I credit Adam not only for his help with my social media and videos, but for keeping memories of Power Pro alive, all these years later.

David Oswald started his adventure in the wrestling business before I did, even though we graduated high school together. His older brother, Don, joins David and I almost every morning for coffee at McDonald's. I guess we are now officially members of the "old men club." Thank you, David and Don, for being great friends.

I also must thank the people that have been so good to me in my life after wrestling. I have no idea where I would be today without Rick Davidson, Dallas Benson, Lance Smith, Laura Smith, Karen Erney, Brad Erney**,** Will Davidson, Troy Davidson, Don Benson, Lila Benson, Bill Dundee, and Jerry Lawler. Huge thanks to Randy and Dianne West and Jason Jarrett for help getting me back on my feet after Eddie Marlin passed away. Thanks to my old friend Darrell Bruff, who I met in the eighties when the store he managed was the ticket outlet for the Jackson, TN matches. I have had unbelievable support from so many people, both new friends and old. Thanks to my friend Pat Trammell who is my co-host on my live Talking Memphis Wrestling program on Twitter. Through Twitter, I renewed my friendship with Michael St. John. Michael started the wrestling part of his career for Nick Gulas. He has a great voice and is known for being the voice guy in the debut videos for both Hulk Hogan and Kamala. Michael has had a tremendous career in audio, as an announcer, manager and now radio station owner of multiple stations in Alabama and Tennessee. He has performed or managed at stations from Birmingham to Memphis to Nashville to Saint Louis to Los Angeles. There is no doubt Michael will be in the Alabama Broadcasting Hall of Fame and probably the Tennessee Broadcasting Hall of Fame where he will join Dave Brown. I also thank everybody who supports me over all my platforms. My life has been impacted by so many. I tried to cover everybody, but I am sorry if I missed anyone.

Most of all, thank you to the wrestling fans. Thanks for always sticking by me and for purchasing and reading *Living The Dream*. I will close by

stealing from the great Lance Russell: “I’m Randy Hales, bye bye, everybody!!!”

DEDICATION:

This book is dedicated to my dad, Harroll Hales, who left this world before I achieved my goal. Everybody that knows me realizes I am a mommy's boy. I have a lot of regrets about a lot of things that you have read about in this book. However, I have no regrets that during the last few years of my mother's life, I moved her in with me and took care of her and was there by her side every day until the end. I have never been loved by anybody as much as she loved me, and I have never loved anyone like I loved her. My sister Judy was 18 years old when I was born. Since my parents were older, Judy and her husband Bill were like second parents to me. When Bill passed away, I lost the one man who was a father figure to me for more years than my dad was. I miss Bill so bad and I wish he was here to read this book. Finally, I also dedicate this book to Eddie Marlin, who was my wrestling business father.